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Letters to a Fundamentalist

By PERCY AUSTIN, B.A.

With a Foreword by Principal A. E. Garvie.

"The work of one who has a clear grasp of Biblical criticism and yet appreciates the difficulties of those who hold that the Bible, since it is inspired, must be inerrant . . . The author has succeeded in showing clearly the real issue between fundamentalism and modern Biblical scholarship, and his sympathetic handling of the subject adds to its value."

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BY

PERCY AUSTIN, B.A. 1930-

WITH FOREWORD

BY

PRIN. A. E. GARVIE, M.A., D.D.

STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT PRESS
32 RUSSELL SQUARE, LONDON, W.C.1

TO MY WIFE

First published May 1930

Made and Printed in Great Britain
by Turnbull & Spears, Edinburgh

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to write a few sentences of introduction to, and commendation of, this effort to present in an attractive form the spirit, the methods, and the results of modern Biblical scholarship, so as to disclose its great value to the thought and life of the Christian Church, and to remove the prejudices and misrepresentations which have hitherto hindered a more general recognition of that value. The author has on the one hand an adequate knowledge and a sufficient appreciation of this scholarship to present the case competently; and on the other hand he is familiar enough from personal experience with the usually ignorant, and even often unfair, opposition to which it is exposed among earnest devoted Christians, who in other respects are among the most valued members and workers in our Churches; and he knows also from personal contact with thoughtful, reading people, especially among the young, how great a danger to an intelligent faith the traditional views about the Bible are, and how great the need of the removal of the stumbling-block is. He writes not from an intellectual interest alone, but from a practical concern. Nearly half a century ago as a youth I found an escape from religious difficulty and doubt through hearing the lectures of that pioneer, and one may add, martyr of this movement, W. Robertson Smith;

and I, therefore, welcome heartily any effort to render a similar service to the youth of to-day, especially when it is so excellently rendered as in this book.

A. E. G.

New College, London
January 1930

PREFACE

THIS book has been written under a two-fold conviction. First, that there ought to be no need for it; second, that there is need. It says little that is new, and of set purpose most of the books quoted or referred to are those of yesterday rather than of to-day. But when the recent issue of Dr. Gore's Commentary could be the occasion for page-wide headlines in one of the most widely read daily newspapers, proclaiming that "a great sensation" would be caused by the "bombshell" publication, because it denied the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the literal historicity of the Creation narrative, etc., it is evident that there is still great need for elementary instruction, even to the point of emphasising the obvious. When one thinks of the wealth of expository literature that has been given to the world by Biblical scholarship during the past sixty years, one is almost reduced to despair at the slowness with which its teaching seems to penetrate both to the man in the street and, often, to the man in the pew—or even, to judge by the incident just quoted, to those arbiters of public opinion, the Napoleons of the popular Press. Even so wide-awake a publicist as Mr. Arnold Bennett seems to imagine that Christian thought has made little advance beyond the position it held in the narrower

circles of provincial nonconformity with which he was familiar half a century ago. But one's protest against such misunderstanding of the real situation is silenced by the remembrance of the virility of militant "fundamentalism" within the Christian ranks, and one has to realise that other things besides charity must begin at home. The "modern" view of the Bible ought long since to have become so familiar and axiomatic as to render unnecessary any further discussion of the subject. But it is evident that the Christian teacher must still give much of his time to the task of dispelling ignorance, removing misunderstandings and allaying baseless fears concerning the Sacred Book. These letters are offered as a small contribution to that end.

The writer wishes to make two acknowledgments. First, to Dr. Garvie, for the Foreword he has contributed, and for much kindly encouragement. Second, and particularly, to the Rev. D. Glan Morgan, of Carlisle, who has not only compiled the Index, and read the proofs, but has also done much to improve both the form and the matter of the book by his acute and able criticisms.

CONTENTS

PAGE

FOREWORD, BY PRINCIPAL A. E. GARVIE . . 5

PREFACE 7

LETTER

I. REMINISCENCE 13

II. THE ISSUE — THE TWENTIETH CENTURY — MODERN THOUGHT — PIONEERS — FOUNDATION TRUTHS AND UNFOUNDED FEARS 15

III. LABELS — THE BUILDING AND THE FOUNDATIONS — TRADITION OR TRUTH? 23

IV. MEANING OF "MODERNISM"—TRUTH—POSSESSION OR QUEST?—REVELATION AND DISCOVERY—THE MODERNIST ATTITUDE 29

V. CRITICAL INQUIRY—WHAT "CRITICISM" MEANS—MORE THAN FAULT-FINDING 38

VI. "HIGHER AND LOWER CRITICISM"—MANUSCRIPTS AND VERSIONS—NEW LIGHT—VIEWS AND VIEW-POINTS . 44

VII. THE CRITICS CRITICISED—STRENGTH OF THE CRITICAL MOVEMENT 52

VIII. CRITICS AND CRITICS—DR. ORR—THE KESWICK MOVEMENT—SOME USEFUL BOOKS 57

LETTER PAGE

IX. Scholars or Saints?—The Bible is Literature—Inspiration—Facts and Theories—Inspiration in the Creeds—Canon of the New Testament . 64

X. The Bible in Protestant Thought—The Reformers' View—Dr. Burgon—The "Word of God"—The Moslem Doctrine—Luke's Prologue . . . 76

XI. Dean Farrar *versus* the Apostles—Words and the Word—The Sword of the Spirit—Modern Translations 86

XII. Difficulty of Definitions—The Divine Afflatus—The Prophet's Inspiration—Answering the Atheists—Progressive Revelation—Old Testament History—Mechanical Theories 93

XIII. "The Scripture of Truth"—A Fundamentalist Exposition—"Apparent Contradictions"—David's Census—Original Inerrancy—Facts, not Views . 104

XIV. Biblical Editors—Isaiah—Useless Miracles—Pulling the Bible to Pieces? 114

XV. Moses and the Pentateuch—Is the Tradition True?—Mosaic Laws—Spinoza—Astruc—Some Analogies 124

XVI. The Verdict of Jesus—The Gospel Records—The Jesus of the Gospels—The True Glory of Jesus—Jesus, a Child of His Age—Jonah—Parables in O.T. and N.T. 138

XVII. The Fundamentalist Critic — From Cover to Cover—Jesus, our Standard 153

XVIII. Science and the Bible—Revelation and Discovery—The Integrity of Science—Reactionary Religion—Genesis and Geology—Ingenious Theories . . 164

LETTER PAGE

XIX. The Modern is Better—Poetry and Science—Our Debt to the Old—Playing the Game . . 177

XX. The High Place of Poetry—The Poetic and the Prosaic — The Creation Story, Assyrian and Biblical—Science *versus* Religion—The Limitations of Science 185

XXI. Prophecy—Extravagant Interpretations—Apocalyptic—Pseudonymous Writings—Divisions of Jewish Scripture—Common Sense and Imagination . 195

XXII. Social Righteousness and the Prophets — The Old Testament Prophets—The Prophetic Method—The Messianic Hope—The Virgin Birth—Voice crying in the Wilderness 207

XXIII. A Christopher Wren Story—"Verbal Inspiration" is not True—Inherent Power of the Bible . . 218

XXIV. The Charge against Modernism—Destroying Faith? —A Spiritual Pilgrimage 224

XXV. The Bereans—Can a Modernist be a Christian? —Why this Warfare?—Loyalty to Christ . . 235

INDEX 243

I

REMINISCENCE

DEAR FRANK,—It was a great pleasure to run across you at Euston yesterday. As time and tide—and railway trains—wait for no man, we only had about five minutes together, and there was no opportunity for a lengthy chat about old times. I was glad to see you looking so well, and to hear that you are prospering in business. After I left you, and was comfortably established in my corner seat, I found it quite impossible to settle down to any one of the three books that I had taken with me to while away the long hours of my journey—even though one of them was a "thriller"! Old memories came rushing back, and I found there was nothing for it but to surrender myself to a veritable orgy of reminiscence. It is hard to realise that nearly twenty-five years have passed since we were lads together in the old Bible Class. They have been crowded years, full of interest, and of ever-widening experience. But one cannot help regretting that in the busy rush of life many of the ties of youthful friendship have been weakened, though I suppose it is inevitable. You and I were great pals in those old days, but our ways diverged, and for many years now we have been quite out of touch with each other. However, as a happy chance brought us together again, perhaps we could take up the old

threads in some measure. I am not a good correspondent—probably it was my slackness in that respect that led to the gradual dropping of our old intimacy—but I feel sure we could both find time for an occasional letter, for the sake of Auld Lang Syne. Write and tell me all about yourself. I need not ask you to be frank—you always were that, by name and nature. Do you remember the candour—the almost brutal candour I thought it at the time—with which you used to criticise my youthful attempts at sermon-making? However, I have long since realised that those drastic criticisms were of far more value to me than were the sugary compliments with which some kindly but unwise folk greeted my crude productions. I mention this well-remembered trait of yours for this reason: I was somewhat puzzled by the way you referred, twice in five minutes, to "you parsons." Was I wrong in thinking that there was at least a suspicion of scorn in your tone? If so, what has incurred your wrath? Have you joined the ranks of that very considerable section of the laity that thinks that we parsons are rather a poor lot? If so, unmask your batteries, and let fly. It is a wholesome discipline for us to be dragged out of our supposed clerical seclusion—though such seclusion is largely an amusing figment of the lay imagination—and to be told plainly what other people think about us.

II

THE ISSUE

It was good of you to write so promptly and so fully. I was delighted to find that the passing of the years has not toned down your youthful vigour. Your letter has that same note of blunt candour that I remember so well as one of your outstanding characteristics of old. I gladly welcome it, especially as I know that you will welcome a similar outspokenness from me. After all, a friendship is hardly worthy the name if it fears frankness.

You say that I was quite right in thinking that your references to the "parsons" were not complimentary. You tell me that you have largely lost confidence in us "professional exponents of religion" because you are convinced that we are playing traitor to the cause. We are nearly all tainted with rationalistic modernism, and are seeking to undermine the Faith that we are pledged—and paid—to uphold. We are offering stones to starving souls instead of bread, and it therefore behoves all who are concerned for God's cause, and the interests of spiritual religion, to take a firm stand, and to offer uncompromising resistance to all those who are disloyal to the Word of Truth. The issue, you say, is quite clear and definite. It is between Fundamentalism and Modernism, and between the two there can be no more fellowship than there can be between

light and darkness, truth and falsity, loyalty and treachery.

Altogether you leave me in no doubt as to where you stand. But are you sure that you are quite fair in your drastic generalisations about those to whom you place yourself in opposition? Is there not a little too much of the "railing accusation" about your onslaught? Generalisations can be very unfair, and very far from the truth. Edmund Burke said that it was impossible to indict a whole nation, and the wisdom of his statement is applicable in other fields than that of politics. You remember Tennyson's "Northern Farmer," with his, "Taake my word for it, Sammy, the poor in a loomp is bad." But they are not. Nor are you justified in "lomping" together all those Christians and Christian ministers who do not pledge themselves to the so-called fundamentalist standards, and in labelling them as bad. Wide assumptions easily become wild ones.

However, so far as my own position is concerned, I can set your mind at rest at once. I am not one with you in your fundamentalism, though I claim to be a fundamentalist. Nor can I agree with your attitude to modernism, because I am myself a modernist. I am a fundamentalist because I am a modernist. As I understand it, modernism is engaged in the task of elucidating the fundamentals. I do not see how we can be twentieth-century Christians without being both fundamentalist and modernist. And, after all, we are twentieth-century Christians. We may sometimes pine for what we imagine to have been the "good old days." We may think that the Golden Age of Faith lies in the

more or less distant past, when belief was simple and unclouded, and the race of scholars had not arisen to ask disturbing questions, or to pursue their unsettling investigations—though whether such a picture can be reconciled with the actual facts of Christian history is another matter. But whether or no, we live in the twentieth century, in the realm of twentieth-century thought and knowledge, with all their far-reaching implications. In all the ordinary concerns of life we consider that to be a matter for profound thankfulness. We rejoice to be modern in our use and enjoyment of the manifold blessings and advantages that modern knowledge has provided for us. We seek the best modern education for our children. If we are ill we want the best modern medical skill. We travel by modern means. We may think that there was the glamour of romance about the old stage coach, but we are very glad that we live in the era of express trains and motor cars, to say nothing of aeroplanes. And I take it that you yourself would have no objection to listening to a fundamentalist sermon through the ultra-modern medium of wireless.

And is there anything wrong in the suggestion that our religion should have a modern note? Is it not, in fact, inevitable? That does not mean that we need to seek a new-fangled Faith in place of that which has come down to us through the centuries, but it does mean, surely, that we should hold our Faith in a modern way, that we should express it in terms that are intelligible to the modern mind, and that we should fearlessly do our thinking in the light of modern knowledge. That wonderful progress has been made in our day in the realm of scientific truth

is, of course, beyond question, but surely all Truth is ultimately One. If not, how can we speak of a *universe*? All Truth must have its centre and source in the God of Truth, and what the scientist is doing is, as Kepler said long ago, to "think God's thoughts after Him." All that Science can discover sheds new light on God's purposes and methods, and all that is revealed by historical research enables us more clearly to understand the "Divine Plan of the Ages." Surely if we believe in the God of Truth we Christians should be in the very forefront of modern progress. Christian thought should lead the world, instead of lagging hopelessly in the rear. Is there not something humiliating in the spectacle of Christians earning the scorn of the world because we hold on tenaciously to many ideas and conceptions that every intelligent schoolboy knows are untenable in the light of the fuller knowledge of our day? Why are we so slow to learn wisdom from past experience? We cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the history of the "Warfare between Science and Religion" contains many pages that should make us blush. There ought never to have been any suggestion of warfare, nor would there have been if the protagonists of religion had always remembered that Truth is invincible, that its claims are paramount, and that the course of its progress makes inevitable the constant reinterpretation of its traditional forms of expression.

Are not you and your friends misinterpreting the whole situation? Is not your attitude to modern thought based on the assumption that Christian Truth has been possessed by the Church in its entirety since the beginning of the Christian era;

that it has always been fully and clearly understood and proclaimed, and that it is only in our own day that its teaching has been questioned, and its line departed from? In a word, that modernism is quite a modern thing. But it most certainly is not. The word as a party label may be of recent invention, but the thing that it represents is as old as Christianity. In all ages when religion has been alive and progressive it has had its modernist problem, though it has not always called it by that name. There have been many periods of Christian history, often long drawn out, when religious thought has been stereotyped, if not stagnant, but they have been the periods when religious life has been on a low level, lacking both vitality and enthusiasm. The great days of the Church have been marked, not only by the richness of its life, and the zeal of its service, but also by the keenness of its thought, And keen thinking means progressive thinking. Hence a very important phase of Christian history is the history of Christian thought. The thinkers of the Church have ever been pioneers, discovering new territory, and revealing wider vistas of truth. Fresh light has ever been breaking forth from God's Word, and the Church has been led into ever clearer understanding of the Divine Message that she is commissioned to proclaim. The most rigid and uncompromising fundamentalist of to-day holds many views of truth that were regarded as dangerous "modernist" heresies not so many generations ago. He may quite sincerely believe that he is simply holding fast the "faith once for all delivered to the saints," and that it has always been held fast by the saints. But if the essence of the faith be the same, the forms in

which it is expressed are not. It is often said that the heterodoxy of one generation becomes the orthodoxy of the next, and certainly that has very often been so. Of course each generation has usually been convinced in its own mind that it was an exception to the rule, and that the orthodoxy for which it was contending was the final truth, but the steady march of progress has gone on all the same. Does not the New Testament itself give us evidence that even the Apostle Paul was suspect among certain sections of the Church on account of his "advanced" views? Recall how, in the Epistle to the Galatians, he pleads for a larger liberty. Anselm was a modernistic new theologian when he wrote his great book on the Atonement, *Cur Deus Homo*, and thereby demolished the crude "ransom to the devil" theory that had dominated Christian thought for centuries. Luther and the Reformers were iconoclastic modernists when they dared, in the name of Truth, to challenge ideas and conceptions which had held sway for so long. William Carey was a disturber of the peace of the Church when he insisted that the orthodoxy of his day was obscuring the great New Testament truth of the missionary obligation. While it is less than a century since M'Leod Campbell was deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland for daring to proclaim the modernist heresy that "God so loved the world," and that Christian salvation was a free offer to every man, and not the exclusive privilege of an elect few.

These examples, chosen almost at random from a very large number, should be sufficient to prove to you that even the fundamentalist orthodoxy of to-day owes a tremendous debt to the modernists, and

new theologians, and heretics of earlier generations. Or, to take an example of a somewhat different kind, no fundamentalist assembly to-day has any qualms about singing the beautiful hymns of T. T. Lynch, though when they were first published they gave rise to one of the most virulent theological controversies of modern times, owing to their supposed heresies.

History repeats itself, and it is quite safe to prophesy that the champions of orthodoxy a generation hence will be defending some present-day teachings with a vigour equal to that with which they are now being assailed. No new interpretation of truth meets with immediate and general acceptance, for the natural instincts of the majority of mankind are conservative, especially where religion is concerned, and we usually dislike the disturbance of ideas that we have comfortably fitted into our mental framework. But, however cold may be their first reception, the newer ideas always prevail in the long run, *if they are true*. If they are not true, they speedily pass into oblivion. Truth is invincible. No foe can vanquish it, nor can its onward march be stayed, though it may be retarded. And it is well to remember that such retarding may be brought about by the misplaced zeal of friends even more than by the direct antagonism of foes. Hence it seems to me that one thing we Christians need never do is to " tremble for the Ark of the Lord." As a matter of fact, such " trembling," though it be, as undoubtedly it often is, inspired by a love for God's cause, and a zeal for the Faith, is really due to a weakness of faith. If our faith is strong we cannot fear for the Faith.

So I say again, that as *twentieth-century* Christians we cannot help being modernist in the true sense of that word. And the fact is one to rejoice in, for in so far as we refuse to avail ourselves of the manifold advantages of modern thought and knowledge, by so much do we limit and impoverish our religious life and thought. At the same time, as twentieth-century *Christians* we must be fundamentalist. We inherit the unchanging truths of the Christian revelation and redemptive experience, that are the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. These are the true fundamentals, the foundation truths upon which the whole superstructure of our religion is built. And as far as I am concerned, I am prepared to contend, just as earnestly as you do, that no one has the right to the name of Christian unless he is loyal to the fundamentals. I do suggest, however, and very earnestly, that as Christians we should make quite sure that it *is* the Christian fundamentals to which we are giving our loyalty.

III

LABELS

I AM sorry that in my last letter I did not altogether succeed in making my meaning clear. However, as you generously invite me to "have another go" I gladly accept the invitation.

First, then, I beg of you to believe that I am not trying to obscure the issue by mere verbal subtleties. Although I regard the matter from a standpoint very different from yours, I am quite in agreement with you as to its seriousness. If I may sum up my previous argument, it amounts to this: that the issue cannot be settled by the simple expedient of tacking on labels. It is a common human weakness to imagine that great questions can be settled by that simple expedient, and we Christians are particularly prone to that failing. But the truth is that the labels seldom fit. You may express truth in an epigram, or in a pithy phrase, but it is seldom more than a particular aspect of truth that you can express in that way, and the paradox is that a partial expression of truth may be untrue.

Labels seldom if ever satisfy the ideal of "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Take, for instance, the label that you adopt for yourself—fundamentalist. You use it as though it were unambiguous, unequivocal, and completely satisfactory. You tell me that you rejoice in it and

are proud of it. The modernist, you say, may flounder about in the slough of uncertainty and perplexity, but the fundamentalist has his feet firmly planted on the rock of assurance. In passing I would pause to point out that if this is a true reading of the situation, surely your attitude to the modernist should be one of pity rather than of scorn, and your desire should be to help him out of the slough, rather than to abuse him for being unfortunate enough to be in it.

But let us examine your label a little more closely. You know, of course, that the word "fundamental" is derived from the Latin word *fundamentum*, meaning foundation. We often use the word as though it were synonymous with "important," but a thing may be important and valuable without being fundamental. From my window here I have a splendid view of Windsor Castle. If I had to write a description of that noble historic pile, with its towers and turrets, wings and wards, it would be somewhat misleading, to say the least, if I entitled my essay "The Foundations." Every part of the castle may have its interest and value and importance, but not every part is a fundamental. Nor is it difficult to prove that much of the superstructure had no part in the original plan. There are many later additions and developments, not all of which are of equal architectural interest or practical worth. So precisely is it with the superstructure of Christian teaching. In the course of the centuries there have been many doctrinal developments, and many additions have been made to the building. They *may* all be of value; they *may* all be in harmony with the original architectural plan, but they are not all

part of the foundation. Hence I suggest that if we are going to incorporate the word fundamental in our religious vocabulary we should at least be careful to use it correctly. Certainly no one section of Christians has any right to appropriate the word as its exclusive possession.

Let me illustrate the point in another way. A few years ago a series of little booklets was issued in America, and widely circulated both in that country and in this, bearing the title *The Fundamentals*. They gave a very comprehensive exposition and defence of the Christian Faith from the old orthodox standpoint, and as such were very interesting and instructive. But their title was a misnomer, all the same. What they gave was not only a description of the foundations, but also a detailed survey of the whole superstructure, and as much importance seemed to be attached to the defence of traditional ideas concerning minor parts of the structure, as to the exposition of the truly basic facts.

At about the same time a small band of Oxford "modernist" scholars published a book entitled *Foundations*. Its nine essays discussed such fundamental questions as The Bible, The Historic Christ, The Divinity of Christ, The Atonement, The Church, God and the Absolute, etc. Now I am not concerned for the moment with the way in which those great subjects were dealt with, nor am I forgetting that Father Ronald Knox published a very clever and witty rejoinder under the satirical title *Some Loose Stones*, but I do seriously suggest that those modernist Oxford scholars were more truly fundamentalist than were their American confrères who wrote *The Fundamentals*. They asked,

and did their best to answer, the question, What are the basic facts, the all-essential vital truths upon which the whole system of the Christian religion is built? That is the question with which "modern" Christian thought is supremely concerned. As I put it in my last letter, the modernist is engaged in the task of elucidating the fundamentals. Now you may not agree with the newer view-point, and with its interpretations, and you may sincerely think that "the old is better." If so, you have perfect freedom to retain those views and interpretations which in your judgment are more satisfactory, but in all fairness you must allow the same freedom to your fellow-Christian who finds that, for him, the older interpretations are not satisfactory, and who, inspired by a faith and devotion as real as your own, follows a line of thought that helps him, even if it does not help you. Certain it is that, whatever some folk may think of its results, modern critical inquiry is an inevitable modern development, and we can no more stay its progress than Dame Partington could sweep back the waves of the Atlantic with her mop. And surely we Christians pay a poor tribute to our religion if we have any fears as to the result of such inquiry, especially when we remember that it is for the most part being conducted by men of faith whose only desire is to serve the cause of truth. If there is one thing that has been demonstrated by the Christian scholarship of our day it is that critical inquiry can be reverent inquiry, and that its results can be of inestimable value not only for Christian thought but also for Christian devotion.

You can justly charge me with inconsistency if I follow up my argument against labels by trying to

fit a new one to you, but if you must have a descriptive title, a name that fits you far more accurately is "traditionalist," though it, again, is by no means free from objection. What you and your friends are doing is to support, and contend for, the *traditional* interpretation of Christian truth. In effect you say that what has been handed down to us from our forbears *is* truth, and we must cherish it, and pass it on unaltered and unblemished to those who shall come after us. It is complete and all-satisfying in itself, and needs neither any addition to it, nor any subtraction from it. It is the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. Now examination may prove that you are completely justified in your assertion, but are you justified in objecting to any such examination? May not a fellow-Christian be just as earnest and devoted, and just as concerned for the truth when he says, "Let us carefully examine the traditions that we have received, and seek to discover if they are all equally valid. Let us see if the traditional interpretations are adequate interpretations of the truth to which they give expression"? That is the typical attitude of the modern approach to religion, and it is one that surely does not need apology. Its object is not to attack truth but to bring the truth itself into the open, so that it can be clearly seen in its own light, and make its own appeal.

To sum up, don't you think it would be a splendid thing if we could modify our enthusiasm for party labels and shibboleths, and set ourselves to explore more fully the glorious resources of the one great all-inclusive name of *Christian*? As followers of our Lord Jesus Christ we are called to warfare, but surely

not to civil warfare. In face of the tragic need of the world, the world that God loves, and for which Christ died ; and remembering that to us Christians is committed the task of proclaiming to the world an Evangel, is it not pitiful—nay, shameful—that we should spend so much of our time and strength in internecine strife ? We cannot hope for complete agreement in our views, but need that prevent our rejoicing in our fellowship ? One is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren. Cannot the so-called fundamentalist and modernist alike apply the generous sentiment of Abraham in his noble words to Lot : " Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren " ? Or, better still, can we not echo the Apostle's prayer, " Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus " ? Do you never sing Whittier's hymn,

O Lord and Master *of us all*,
Whate'er our name or sign ?

IV

MEANING OF "MODERNISM"

I WANT to anticipate a criticism that I am sure you will make of my last letter. You will point out, with justice, that although I argued against the use of labels, and especially that of Fundamentalism, I tacitly accepted and endorsed that of Modernism. But I want to make it clear that my remarks about the inadequacy of labels apply all round. In so far as Modernism is used as a party designation I have no use for it. Used in that way I consider it inappropriate and misleading. All that I personally am prepared to contend for is the legitimacy and inevitability of the modern view-point, and the modern method of approach to religion and its problems. But let me elaborate the point somewhat.

I think I am right in saying that Modernism as a religious term is used in two senses, one particular, and the other more general. In the former sense it first came into prominence in the Roman Catholic Church. Certain scholars, notably the Abbé Loisy in France, and Father Tyrrell in this country, became advocates of progressive views in the matter of Biblical Criticism and cognate subjects, and their teaching was officially condemned by an Encyclical of Pope Pius X, in 1907. The condemned views were described by the term "Modernism." Naturally the name stuck, and has been used ever since to

designate the particular type of teaching with which Loisy, Tyrrell and others were associated. As, however, such teaching was in no sense peculiar to Roman Catholicism, but was even more widespread among the progressive thinkers of other Churches, the name by which it was described speedily came into general use—or variations of it, like "Modern Churchman"—and is now a well-recognised party designation.

But even so, the chief use of the term is more general. In this wider sense it is not the designation of a particular party, with a definite organisation and a clearly defined body of teaching, but of a general view-point or attitude that is widely taken, but which is far too general and variable to admit of exact definition. When the fundamentalist speaks of Modernism he usually means the whole progressive movement in religion. Anything that departs from the old orthodox standards, and that seeks to accommodate itself to modern teaching, whether in the realm of Science or of Biblical Criticism, comes under the fundamentalist ban. To the man in the street, or his cousin, the man in the pew, the term Modernism carries this somewhat vague general significance. If he is unsympathetic, as unfortunately he often is, he is content to follow what I called the "Northern Farmer" method, and to say, "the poor in a loomp is bad." It is impossible to read fundamentalist literature without realising that this is the attitude generally taken. When I read such literature I am not sure whether its most striking feature is the intensity of its dislike of Modernism, or the vagueness of its understanding of what Modernism really is.

What I want to suggest to you is, that this rough-

and-ready method of classification and condemnation simply will not do. It is true that "dangerous diseases require desperate remedies," but before you apply the desperate remedy of wholesale condemnation to modern religious teaching, ought you not in all fairness to take the trouble to find out if it is the dangerous disease that you imagine? Of course I recognise that every new idea is not necessarily a true one. The attitude of mind that eagerly welcomes any new teaching just because of its novelty is as unworthy as that which condemns for the same inadequate reason. As Dr. Forsyth put it, our attitude to criticism should be critical. The test question should always be, not "Is it new?" but "Is it true?"

What, then, are the main features of the modern view-point? Perhaps I can best approach that question through another: Is Truth a possession or an object of search? You would say, I think, that it is primarily a possession. We have it in its entirety, or at least as entirely as is either possible or necessary for us. The Truth has come down to us from earlier ages. We are its present custodians, and it is our duty to guard the deposit, and to pass it on undimmed and unaltered to those who will come after us. I do not mean that the search for Truth has no place in your life and thought. You "search the Scriptures," with zeal and devotion, but you are convinced that the utmost that you can do is to explore the riches of your *possessions*. You are like a man who has inherited an extensive estate, one who as time passes comes to know it ever more intimately. You are not like a pioneer who sets out to make discoveries in hitherto unknown and unappropriated territory.

Now it would be altogether misleading if I suggested that the modern thinker is such a pioneer in unknown territory as *contrasted* with the happy and contented possessor of an ancestral domain. But he does believe that Truth is only partially a possession : it is also an object of search. There are vast territories yet unexplored. The modern thinker also has his inherited estate, but he believes that his knowledge of it, and his ability to make the best use of it, are greatly enhanced by what he can learn through voyages of exploration in regions beyond. Do you remember Olive Schreiner's beautiful dream phantasy of the Seeker after Truth that she gives us in her *Story of an African Farm* ? Truth is represented as a beautiful bird, of which the hunter in early life catches a fleeting glimpse. From that moment he is consumed with a passionate longing to secure for himself the wonderful prize. He sets out alone on a long and toilsome search. Constantly he is baffled and disappointed, but he perseveres. He reaches the steep " mountains of stern reality," beyond which he is assured lies Truth. On those mountains few feet have passed ; each man strikes out a path for himself. The hunter toils on, the path becoming ever lonelier, steeper and more difficult. Finally, he reaches massive walls of rock, in which he has to cut out painfully a foothold for each step. " And the years rolled on : he counted them by the steps he had cut —a few for a year—only a few." At long last, worn out with toil and disappointed hopes, he lays himself down to die ; his only cheer the thought that others who come after him will at least be able to make use of the steps that he has cut in the rock. " Then slowly from the white sky above, through

the still air, came something falling, falling, falling. Softly it fluttered down, and dropped on to the breast of the dying man. He felt it with his hands. It was a feather. He died holding it."

No Christian can read that story, with its deep pathos, without being moved to pity. It was written by one who had lost faith, and who had therefore missed what, to the man of faith, is a glorious reality: that "through faith we understand." Through faith we know that the search for Truth is not doomed to such disappointment. It is not only a solitary feather from the wing of the bird of Truth that, at long last, is the seeker's reward. Through faith we know Him who said, "I am the Truth," and hence Truth is for faith a glorious possession. But even so, the story pictures an aspect of experience that is as real for the Christian as it is for the man of no faith. The Christian possession is not complete. We are seekers. The ideal of Truth is ever beckoning us onwards. We must never forget that it was He who said, "I am the Truth," who also said, "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He shall guide you into the Truth."

The fundamentalist rejoices in the reality of the revealed Truth of God. The modern thinker does likewise, but he also sees an ever deeper meaning in the pregnant words of the writer of Proverbs, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing." God is Revealer *and* Concealer. His past revelation is not a revelation of everything. Nothing has ever been revealed that man could discover for himself, even though it took him millenniums to make the discovery. As we look back over the past we can clearly see that the progress of humanity has found

one of its greatest incentives in the Divine concealments. Man has advanced in so far as he has been a seeker, an explorer, a discoverer. We recognise the truth of that in what we call the secular realm, but we have been too ready to draw a hard and fast line of demarcation between the secular and the sacred, and to believe that an entirely different principle is operative in the one sphere from what we find in the other. But the distinctions that we make are largely artificial. God is God of all. All Truth is His Truth. Even the distinction that we draw, and which seems to us so fundamental, between the natural and the supernatural, must be meaningless from the Divine side. Hence it surely follows that the promise of the guidance of the Spirit of Truth into all the Truth must be allowed the widest and fullest interpretation. We must recognise the reality of such guidance, even though the one who is guided acknowledge it not, in every new discovery or triumph of research. All that can be discovered in any realm of knowledge is part of the great unity of Divine Truth. Each new revelation of the wonder of the Universe brings us a fuller knowledge of the Divine Author. And each new discovery gives fuller and richer meaning to our old possessions. As in reading a book, we often find that the later chapters throw light on the earlier ones. The earlier chapters had their interest, nor did we fail to understand them when we read them; but we understand them more fully in the light of what we read later in the book. So we to-day are reading new chapters in God's great book of Universal Truth, and they are throwing a wonderful flood of new light on the old chapters with which we have been

so long familiar. Our possession of Truth becomes more glorious as we make Truth the object of our search. We understand the past better as we explore the present, and look to the future.

I can see an objection that you may quite fairly raise. You may ask, "Does this mean that the revelation of God in Christ was only partial, and not all-sufficient and complete as Christian faith has always rejoiced to believe"? Not at all. The Christian mind, however "modern" it may be, can conceive the possibility of nothing higher than "the Truth as it is in Jesus." But are we sure that the full meaning and glory of that Truth have yet dawned upon the mind of even Christian men, or that it has been explored to its farthest bounds, and its widest implications realised? A rallying cry that has been raised in our day is "Back to Christ." In the sense in which it is used by those who adopt it, it has much justification. But I am not at all sure that "Forward to Christ" would not more truly express the Christian ideal. The clear-cut distinction that many thinkers have drawn between the "Jesus of History" and the "Christ of Faith" is one that, in my judgment, misinterprets the deeper realities both of Christian history and of Christian experience, but even if we take that view, and believe that for Christian faith the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith are indissolubly One, that very fact involves this, that we do not need to go *back* to Christ. If Christ be with His people in living presence and power, is He not in front of us, ever beckoning us forward? Paul did not speak of going back. To him Jesus was his Leader, and he pressed on toward the mark.

It is not accurate to say that the modern mind, Christian or non-Christian, is dissatisfied with old-time Truth, and is seeking to replace it with something more satisfying. Truth is timeless. It is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. But the larger knowledge of modern times has led men to realise that many of the old-time interpretations of Truth are inadequate for our day; and also that many conceptions that were held to *be* Truth are now revealed to be only inaccurate and imperfect attempts to express Truth. Hence, however noble and satisfying may have been the service that they rendered in their day, and however hallowed may be their associations, our very loyalty to the Truth itself compels us to discard them.

> Our little systems have their day,
> They have their day, and cease to be;
> They are but broken lights of Thee,
> And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.

That, as I understand it, is the fundamental of the modernist attitude. Its outstanding characteristic is a profound conviction of the supremacy, invincibility and universality of Truth, and that all Truth has its source in the God of Truth. And allied with this conviction there is a reverent humility of mind, and willingness to learn; a confident belief that the Spirit of Truth does guide the seeker, and that "the Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." It is because of this that many of us who rejoice to hold the Evangelical Faith, and to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ, gladly take that modern attitude, and find that it not only widens our knowledge, but

that it also deepens our experience, and strengthens our loyalty to Him whose we are and whom we serve. I do most earnestly wish that I could remove from your mind the baseless fears that are troubling you in the matter. The misunderstanding of the whole situation that is in the mind of so many earnest and devout believers is most profoundly to be deplored, for it is sadly distracting the Christian fellowship, and hampering our Christian witness. I beg of you to cease thinking of the "modern" Christian as a disturber of the peace of the Church, and as a mere restless seeker after something new. As Dr. Leighton Parks puts it, "He is not a Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as unintellectual as other men, or even as this fundamentalist." Think of him as a fellow-Christian, and even if you cannot always agree with him, do try to understand him. You will find that all that he is doing is to apply an apostolic word, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

V

CRITICAL INQUIRY

WHEN I read your reply to my last two letters I was not at all sure if I should not "do well to be angry." You do not attempt to deal with my main argument, but you swoop down like a hawk on one quite innocent word that I used, and fasten your talons in it. But your doing so gives me excuse for inflicting another screed on you, so I will not complain. The responsibility is on your own head.

Well, then, let us examine this word that you so vigorously assail. I referred to modern "critical" inquiry, and you tell me that it is just there that you join issue with the whole modern movement in religion, for you consider that its "critical" note is its condemnation. The Bible, you say, is a book to be honoured and obeyed, not to be criticised. That it should be assailed by the unbeliever is only to be expected, but that professed believers should join in the assault is enough to make angels weep. It is shameful disloyalty. If men want to criticise the Bible, let them at least have the decency to appear in their true colours, and not profess a hypo-critical regard for what they set out to assail. If scholars are Christians in any worthy sense, their regard for the honour of Jesus Christ should keep them from the impious task of criticising the Book

whose supreme value is that it is the Book of Christ.

I need hardly say that I am in full sympathy with you in your jealous regard for the honour of our Lord, and, like you, I believe that that involves a real concern for the honour of the Book. No true Christian can feel anything but pain, and righteous indignation, when men, whether professed Christians or not, lay irreverent hands upon it. And that that has often been done in the name of scholarship, none can deny. But the point I want to make in this letter is this: your protest—and mine—against such unworthy handling of the Scriptures has nothing whatever to do with the validity, or otherwise, of Biblical Criticism. To "criticise" the Bible is not the same thing as to attack the Bible.

Personally, I have very little faith in the value of what is called Bible Defence, and I always decline appeals to join associations and leagues that are out to "defend" the Word of God. Truth is its own best defence, and the most effective way to defend the Bible is to let it stand on its own merits and make its own appeal. Moreover, I always find that so-called Defence campaigns turn out to be for the defence of particular views about the Bible, rather than of the Bible itself. My own study of the question has led me to the conviction that the Bible to-day is far more effectively defended by those who "criticise" it. That may sound a flippant paradox, but let me try to explain what I mean.

Unfortunately "criticism" is a word that is sadly misunderstood and misused in this connection—often in ignorance, but sometimes, I fear, deliber-

ately. When I hear educated men denouncing criticism, or when I read in fundamentalist journals and magazines articles and fulminations along the line of your protest, I confess that I am often moved to a sense of shame. It is an unworthy and inexcusable method of controversy, an unfair "playing to the gallery." Nothing is easier than to win the applause of the crowd by such denunciations, but the men who make them know perfectly well, if they are educated men, that the crowd understands by the word something quite different from the meaning it bears in the realm of scholarship. Naturally the crowd, when it consists, as it usually does, of simple-minded believers who know little or nothing of the technicalities of theological or Biblical learning, *is* moved to indignation when it is assured by its leaders that the Book it loves and reveres is being "criticised" and "torn to pieces" by the scholars. Those leaders seldom stop to point out that in the realm of scholarship "criticism" is a technical word, and that its technical use is quite different from its popular use in everyday speech. I came across an interesting, and in its way an amusing, illustration of that a few years ago. A fervid friend sent me a copy of an American fundamentalist magazine in the hope that its articles might convert me from the supposed error of my ways. The gist of most of the articles was that modern "criticism" was, by its very nature, an impious thing, to be resisted by the faithful at all costs. On the front page of the magazine was a prospectus of the Bible Institute that issued it, with the names of the teaching staff. The first name was that of a widely known fundamentalist leader,

since gone to his rest, who used to arouse audiences to enthusiasm as he denounced the "critics" and all their evil doings. But he was described as "principal and *professor of Biblical Criticism.*" You see the point? In the realm of his scholastic duties the worthy man was proud to devote his talents to the task of "criticising" the Bible. As the popular leader of the fundamentalist hosts he denounced "criticism" as though it were of the Evil One himself. Was it playing the game?

The simple fact is that in popular usage "criticism" almost always carries the implication of fault-finding, whereas the true meaning of the word—its fundamental meaning—carries no such implication. Criticism comes from a Greek word κρισις, meaning judgment. The cognate verb, meaning "to judge," is used in the New Testament of "judging," not only in the sense of condemning, but also in the sense of approving or esteeming. That is to say, criticism *may* lead to an adverse verdict of condemnation, but equally it may not. Our great newspapers employ members of their staffs as musical or literary critics, but they are not commissioned simply to find fault. Their criticism of a musical performance, or of a new book, may be an enthusiastic appreciation, a veritable pæan of praise, but it is none the less a criticism, if the critic has done his work properly.

Now in the realm of Biblical scholarship "criticism" is used exclusively in that technical sense. Biblical criticism is only another name for specialised Bible Study. The critic studies the Bible, examining its problems, linguistic, literary and historical, with one object only in view, viz., to reach a true judgment concerning the facts. Critics may, and,

of course, do vary in their conclusions, but criticism *per se* is not a matter of conclusions but of the method by which they are arrived at. If you, for instance, make a careful study of the Pentateuch in the light of all the available facts concerning it, and as a result come to the conclusion that its books are a unity that comes to us from the hand of Moses, you are just as much a critic as is the most extreme upholder of the theory of their composite structure and post-Mosaic compilation. The difference is not that he is a critic, while you are not, but that your criticism has led you to a different conclusion from his.

The Bible, like all ancient literature, presents us with many problems, literary and historical. We do not come up against them in any marked degree in our ordinary devotional reading, though even there we do not escape them altogether. But that the problems exist, no honest Bible student can deny. The ordinary Bible reader need not, perhaps, concern himself very much about them. Certainly it would be absurd to suggest that it is necessary to have a clear understanding of them, and of their solution, before the Bible can be to us "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path." But none the less we can be grateful to the scholars who reverently and painstakingly devote themselves to the investigation and elucidation of those problems. Making every allowance for the fact that there have been, and are, many absurd vagaries of criticism, the solid results of modern critical research have shed a wonderful light upon the Sacred Book, and they are of inestimable value. The work of criticism does not supersede, or make unnecessary, the devotional

reading of the Bible: that remains, and ever must remain, the thing of supreme importance. But criticism can supplement such devotional study, and its results, if rightly used, can be a valuable aid to devotion.

VI

"HIGHER AND LOWER CRITICISM"

You say that you are not convinced, or even greatly impressed, by my specious defence of Biblical Criticism; that, while as a plain man you admit that you are not competent to deal with all the technicalities of the subject, nevertheless your plain man's judgment leads you to feel that I have been engaged in the not very commendable task of "whitewashing"; that while, again, I personally may believe that the devotional study of the Bible is more important than the critical study, yet the fact that criticism is called the "Higher" Criticism proves that its advocates claim for it a superiority and higher import which, from the devout Christian standpoint, is surely its condemnation.

I quite agree, *if* Higher Criticism means what you assert. But does it? Have you not got hold of a wrong idea altogether? The fact that you, and many other earnest folk, have that idea is, I am afraid, another confirmation of what I said in a previous letter, viz., that there has been a great deal, not only of misunderstanding, but also of misrepresentation of the subject. No one who has ever taken the trouble to read carefully a book expounding the critical case, or explaining the critical method, could possibly remain under such a misapprehension. And when we remember that a multitude of such books,

both popular and technical, has been in circulation for more than a generation past, it is amazing that such misapprehension is still so widespread. For years I have followed a simple method whenever I have been challenged as to my attitude to, or views of, the Higher Criticism. I answer with another question: What *is* the Higher Criticism? And so far I have never received a correct answer! My experience may be unique, though I have no reason for supposing that it is, but certainly I have never personally come into contact with an opponent of Higher Criticism who could give me a clear and correct definition of the thing that he was opposing. In other words, I have always found that opposition to Higher Criticism is based on a misapprehension as to its true nature and purpose. And when I have followed up my first question with another: What is the difference between Higher and Lower Criticism? I have almost invariably been met with a look of bewildered perplexity, which clearly reveals that Lower Criticism is something of which my challengers have never heard. If they had, and knew anything of its meaning, they would have realised that both Higher and Lower Criticism are innocuous and perfectly legitimate scholastic methods, and not at all the insidious and unholy conspiracies that popular imagination has conceived them to be.

It is certainly most unfortunate, from every point of view, that such misunderstandings and misconceptions are so widespread, and I shall be very glad if I can remove them from your mind. The meaning of Higher Criticism is really very simple. The "Higher" has no reference whatever to the heights of superiority. It simply means "higher up the

stream"—that is, nearer the source. Lower Criticism, or Textual Criticism, is concerned with the study of the manuscripts, none of which is original, and most of which are separated by many centuries from the originals. It would be a great boon if we had the original manuscripts of the Biblical writers to refer to, for they would solve many of our most baffling problems, but, unfortunately, we have not, nor does there seem the least hope of our ever discovering them. Hence we must make the best use we can of the later copies that are all that we do possess. Those copies vary considerably in accuracy, in reliability, and in worth. No two are alike in every detail, and the sum of their variations is very considerable. In the New Testament manuscripts alone the known textual variants number at least 30,000. The vast majority of these are quite trivial, but many of them are not trivial, and hence they provide the scholar with a very real and intricate problem. He has to study the manuscripts with minute care, comparing the variant readings, and weighing the evidence for each, so that he may find out, as far as is humanly possible, the most probable text of the original writings from which the later imperfect copies are descended. This collation, as it is called, of the old Greek and Hebrew manuscripts, and their comparison with equally ancient manuscripts of the old Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Latin and other versions, and also with the Scriptural quotations that abound in the writings of the Fathers of the Early Church, is, of course, a necessary preliminary to all modern translation work. We to-day should have no English Bible worthy of the name unless such preliminary spade-work had

been done, and reliable material provided for the translators to work upon. Behind the noble Authorised Version, of which our nation is so justly proud, was the spade-work of Erasmus and other Greek scholars of the time. Behind the Revised Version was the similar, but more efficient work of Westcott and Hort, whose edition of the Greek Testament was the basis on which the Revisers worked. Hence it is clear, I think, that the nature and purpose of this textual study has only to be recognised for its legitimacy and inestimable value to be gratefully acknowledged. Such textual study and investigation is technically known as Textual, or Lower, Criticism.

But there is something more needed. As I have said, our earliest manuscripts are separated by centuries from the originals, and we cannot hope to have a clear and satisfying understanding of the books and their message unless we push our inquiries farther back, going " higher " up the stream towards its source, and studying the books in the light of all the available historical and literary facts and circumstances of the time in which they were written. This is the task of the Higher Criticism. Can you seriously suggest that if the Higher Criticism means this, and it most certainly does, it deserves to be assailed as your friends so often assail it ? Is it not a perfectly legitimate and essential branch of Biblical study ?

The critical study of the Bible really means nothing more nor less than its careful and comprehensive study. Let me briefly explain what I mean by comprehensive. A great deal of our ordinary Bible study is limited in its scope. We take the Bible as

it is, and read it in its own light. This is quite legitimate, for it is profoundly true that the Bible is its own best interpreter. But there is room, and need, for something more. We may obtain light upon the Bible from outside itself. The Bible is an historic fact, having its setting in the history of the times in which it was written. But it is not an isolated fact. Hence our wondrously enlarged knowledge of those times, brought to us through historical and antiquarian research, is invaluable in helping us to understand the Bible in a more complete and comprehensive way than ever before. For example, among the noteworthy discoveries of such research are the Moabite Stone, the Tel el-Amarna tablets, and the Code of Hammurabi, to say nothing of the vast quantities of papyrus fragments. These ancient writings give us a great deal of valuable information, historical, linguistic and religious, concerning Bible times, and they shed a great deal of light upon the Bible itself. The study of the Bible in this clearer light, and the correlation of the new knowledge with the old, or the reinterpretation of the old in the light of the new, is the work of "criticism." Do you seriously suggest that such study is unnecessary or irreverent?

Yet again, even if we confine our reading to the Bible itself we find a number of interesting problems. Why, for example, are there two Creation narratives in the opening chapters of Genesis marked, among other things, by the use of different names for God? The Hebrew word translated "God" in chaps. i.-ii. 3 is not the same as that translated "the Lord God" in chap. ii. 4 onwards. Again, we have in Chronicles historic records which cover the same

ground as the records in the earlier historical books. And when we compare them we find not simply repetition, but in some cases very marked difference. Again, there are questions of authorship. Does the name Jonah, say, at the head of a book mean that Jonah was the author, or simply that it is a book about Jonah? Why does 2 Samuel bear that name in view of the fact that the death of Samuel is recorded in 1 Samuel? Now these and a multitude of similar problems are not the inventions or discoveries of rationalistic modern scholars. They are simply the patent facts which a study of the Bible reveals to us, whether we approach that study from the fundamentalist or the modernist standpoint. Of course we may say, and rightly so, that in comparison with the value of the moral and spiritual teachings of the Bible, all these problems are trivial and unimportant. But they exist, and we cannot hope to have a complete understanding of the Book unless we examine them and seek a reasonable solution of them. Such examination is the work of "criticism." The ordinary Bible reader may lack the qualifications for undertaking such technical research for himself, but ought he not to be grateful to those scholars who are able and willing to dedicate themselves to the task? Especially so when we remember that these problems have not only been a stumbling-block to many earnest souls, but have also provided the chief ground for many of the infidel attacks upon the Bible. We certainly need to be on our guard against the delusion that the bliss of ignorance is a mark of piety and devotion. It cannot be "folly to be wise" where the highest truth is concerned.

If you will take the trouble to read carefully any

good modern commentary, such as, for example, the popular but scholarly little volumes of *The Century Bible*, or the one-volume commentary of Dr. Peake, you will be amazed at the wealth of illuminating information that criticism has placed at our disposal. It is true, of course, that much of that information is " disturbing," in the sense that it upsets many of our old traditional ideas, and compels us to revise many of our old interpretations. That is why criticism is often called destructive, though it is an unfair designation. But careful study always makes it clear that what is " destroyed " is only the faulty and unsubstantiated traditions that have accumulated in the course of the centuries, and which have obscured the true facts. Truth itself can never be destroyed ; the more closely it is examined, the more clearly does its light shine forth.

I was in an old village church the other day where a restoration scheme had recently been carried through. For generations the walls and ceiling had been covered with plaster. The restorers stripped off the plaster, and revealed unsuspected beauties of magnificent old timber and mural carvings. Was their work destructive or constructive ? It was surely both. They destroyed the later accumulations that for long had obscured the original plan, and they reconstructed the original and revealed its true beauty. Such precisely is the work of the Higher Criticism.

I know that most of us find it difficult and distasteful to abandon long-cherished ideas, and to adopt an entirely new view-point. And it is especially so when the old ideas are associated with our religious life, and when we feel that they have vital

concern with our deepest spiritual experiences. We feel that there is a sanctity about those views of divine truth that have nourished our devotional life, and made our religion so intensely real to us, and it would be little to our credit if we did not so feel. But do we not often fall into the error of confusing our particular view of truth with the truth itself? The very fact that we speak of our "views" should be suggestive to us on that point. The view that we have of anything depends not so much upon the thing itself as upon the particular view-point from which we regard it. You told me in a recent letter that last summer you attended the Keswick Convention, and you referred to the delightful view of Derwent Water that you had from Friar's Crag. I know it well, and am not surprised that you wax enthusiastic about it. But had I been at Keswick with you, I should have invited you to join me in a walk down the Borrowdale Valley, and round the Lake, and I should have taken you to a number of vantage points from which you would have had entirely different views that would have convinced you that the glories of Derwent Water and its surroundings are far more wonderful than can be realised by those who only see them from the "traditional" view-point of Friar's Crag. Need I apply the parable?

VII

THE CRITICS CRITICISED

So I still fail to convince you! You say that theoretically the Higher Criticism may be all that I claim for it, but actually it is nothing of the kind. The critics are not such honest and disinterested seekers after truth as I have asserted. Their avowed object is not to introduce us to wider and more varied views of the beauty of the Lake—to use the figure of my little parable about Derwent Water—but rather to blot out the view that we already have. They are deliberately trying to destroy the ideas and beliefs on which for centuries devout souls have nourished their faith, and in place of those ideas and beliefs they offer us a jumble of fantastic, and often mutually contradictory theories of their own. Finally, you recommend me to read Prof. R. D. Wilson's little book *Is the Higher Criticism Scholarly?* and you assure me that if I do, I shall find that the critical case has been very effectively demolished.

My first comment on that is this: if the critical argument has been demolished, why are you still so concerned about it? A victor who has won a complete triumph does not usually go about in fear of his vanquished foe. However, I will not enlarge on that point beyond suggesting that "demolished" is hardly the most appropriate word to use.

Well, I have before acknowledged that there have been, and are, many extravagant vagaries of criticism. Many fanciful theories have been put forth at different times, and naturally they have not stood the test of sane investigation. But one need not worry very much about that kind of thing, for we can always be sure that an absurd theory in any field of scholarship will speedily be crushed under the weight of its own absurdity. Incidentally, before you point the finger of scorn at modern Biblical scholarship because it has sometimes been "wounded in the house of its friends," it would not be amiss for you to survey the history of orthodox Biblical exegesis. You will find that the orthodox fundamentalists of earlier ages have often put forth fanciful and fantastic theories of Biblical interpretation that have carried a far heavier load of absurdity than do the most extravagant of modern critical theories. Consider, also, the records of religious fanaticism, especially as expressed in the multitude of strange sects that have flourished in different parts of the world, and which have proclaimed such unbalanced and extravagant teachings, or cultivated such absurd practices. You will find that, almost without exception, the religious " cranks " adopt a rigorously fundamentalist view of Scripture. But you would think it grossly unfair if anyone were to attack your position because of the unbalanced vagaries of such folk. So with the extravagances that have sometimes been published in the name of critical scholarship. I do beg of you to dismiss from your mind the idea that they are the typical or outstanding results of critical research. The very prominence which they often receive is largely due to the fact that they

are not typical. They *are* extravagant, from the critical point of view as much as from the anti-critical. They distress the friends of true critical scholarship as much as they arouse the indignant scorn of its foes. As Dr. Forsyth says in the preface of his book *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*: "The service rendered to Christianity by the great critical movement is almost beyond words. And there is a vast amount of foreign work which duly and practically recognises the fact without surrendering the note of a positive Gospel. But it is a misfortune to us which is also almost beyond reckoning, that most of the translated works are those of a more or less destructive school. For extremes are always easier to grasp and to sell." Dr. Forsyth is referring particularly to critical work on the great theme with which his book deals, but his words are applicable to the whole domain of Biblical scholarship. Extravagances are always the result of a distorted view, but that is no reason why we should take a distorted view of extravagances.

Yes, I know the little book by Prof. Wilson to which you refer. It is an able and vigorous polemic, but have you read it side by side with a reliable statement of the case that it controverts, or compared it carefully with such a statement? No case can be justly tried *absente reo*, in the absence of the defendant. If, therefore, you will take the trouble to read a reliable and representative statement of the critical case, such as you will find, for example, in Dr. Peake's works, you may still find yourself in sympathy with the attitude of Prof. Wilson, but you most certainly will not be able to say that he has "demolished" the critical position;

nor will you be able honestly to endorse the implication of his title, that criticism is *not* scholarly. Moreover, is there not just a suspicion of the ludicrous about the suggestion that a movement that has been going on for nearly two hundred years, and that has won the unquestioning allegiance of the overwhelming majority of the scholars of the world—many of them against their wish, for they had been brought up in the traditional school, and were only won to the critical position by the hard logic of indisputable facts, and by a sense of loyalty to truth—a movement, moreover, that has produced a voluminous literature and a vast accumulation of facts and arguments, through which, in spite of many differences on points of detail, there runs a thread of unity and agreement, *can* be demolished, or even seriously disturbed, by a small booklet, however able the latter may be? Is it not rather like trying to demolish the Tower of London with a pop-gun? I am afraid it is evident that you have an altogether inadequate conception of the strength and stability and extensiveness of the critical movement. You are labouring under a grave misapprehension if you imagine, as you apparently do, that it is simply a matter of the fanciful theorisings of a few clever men of our own day, who are far more interested in their own cleverness than in the sanctities of the Faith. On the contrary, it is a great *Christian* movement. It is true that many scholars have concerned themselves with the problems, or at any rate certain aspects of them, from an intellectual rather than from a religious point of view. Those problems involve many questions of historical, philological and antiquarian interest that naturally appeal

as much to the secular scholar as they do to the man of faith. When we remember the great part that religion has played in human affairs since the dawn of history, it follows that no scheme of general culture is complete if it leaves out of account the religious experience of humanity, both past and present. Hence, religion and religious literature and history are legitimate subjects of secular as well as of sacred study. But the vast majority of the scholars who have concerned themselves with the particular problems of Biblical research have been men of faith, whose intellectual interest in the subject has been a direct outcome of their religious interest, and who have consequently approached their intellectual task in a religious spirit. If their labours need any apologia, it is abundantly found in their results. There are many of us ordinary Christians with no outstanding intellectual ability, and with no qualifications for independent research, who gratefully bear our testimony that our love for the Bible, and our faith in the Christ of the Bible, have been immeasurably deepened and enriched by those results.

VIII

CRITICS AND CRITICS

You score a direct hit in your rejoinder to my remark about demolishing the Tower of London with a pop-gun. Your reminder that a Goliath who had terrorised a whole army was slain by a pebble from a brook is a very apt retort. One up for you! It is not, however, a knock-out blow. I may be allowed to point out that, if criticism is a Goliath, it has not yet been laid low by Prof. Wilson's pebble, nor by the veritable showers of similar missiles that have been hurled at it. Also may I, in all seriousness, remind you that David prevailed in that historic combat because "the battle was the Lord's"? I know that the same claim is made for the anti-critical assault, but would it not be wiser, and more to the point, to ponder the significance of another historic incident? You will remember the words of Gamaliel when the new "modernist" teaching of the Apostles was creating such a furore in Jerusalem: "And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God."

It was also, of course, a perfectly fair retort that the argument against the critical position is not found only in a few booklets and pamphlets. The

anti-critical position has had its scholarly protagonists, though their number has steadily diminished, and it has produced a voluminous literature. You refer to Dr. Orr's *The Problem of the Old Testament* as an outstanding example. You tell me frankly that you have not read that book, but that you are assured by your leaders that it presents the case against criticism with a fullness and cogency that rejoice the hearts of all who love the old ways.

Now we are neither of us out to score mere debating points against each other. If we were, I could easily score one against you in the matter of Dr. Orr's book. It is an able work, written by a great scholar who rendered noble service to the cause of Christian truth. His chief labours were in the domain of Philosophical Theology and Apologetics, and he will probably be best remembered by his book *The Christian View of God and the World.* But he was also deeply interested in the problem of Biblical criticism, especially with reference to the Old Testament. The book to which you refer was his outstanding work on that subject. It is a thoroughgoing examination and trenchant criticism of certain critical arguments and theories of his fellow-workers in the same field of research, but it is a complete misconception to describe it as an anti-critical work. Dr. Orr himself would not have felt complimented if he had heard himself described as an opponent of Biblical criticism. He wrote *as a critic.* A conservative critic, it is true, but still a critic. But let him speak for himself. I quote at some length from the introductory chapter of his book.

" Nevertheless, this attitude of unreasoning denunciation of what is called ' Higher Criticism ' is

manifestly an extreme; and the problem we have to deal with, if it is to be profitably discussed, requires a clear discrimination of issues. In particular, it cannot too early be recognised that this is not, at bottom, a question simply, as is too commonly assumed, between 'Higher Critics' and 'Non-Higher Critics.' . . . There are, one must own, few outstanding scholars at the present day on the Continent or in Britain—in America it is somewhat different—who do not in greater or less degree accept conclusions regarding the Old Testament of the kind ordinarily denominated critical; yet among the foremost are many whom no one who understands their work would dream of classing as other than believing, and defenders of revealed religion. Such, among Continental scholars, recent or living, are Delitzsch, Riehm, Dillmann, Kōnig, Kittel, Kohler, Strack, Oettli, Westphal, Orelli; in Britain, Dr. Driver, the late Dr. A. B. Davidson, Professor G. A. Smith, and many others; all more or less 'critics,' but all convinced upholders of supernatural revelation. This is not a reason for unquestioning acceptance of their opinions; as critics it will be found that they are far enough from agreeing among themselves. But the attitude to criticism of so large a body of believing scholars may at least suggest to those disposed to form hasty judgments that there is here a very real problem to be solved; that the case is more complex than perhaps they had imagined; that there are real phenomena in the literary structure of the Old Testament, for the explanation of which, in the judgment of many able minds, the traditional view is not adequate, and for which they seem to themselves to find a more satisfactory

solution in some form or other of the critical hypothesis.

"The truth is, and the fact has to be faced, that no one who studies the Old Testament in the light of modern knowledge can help being, to some extent, a 'Higher Critic,' nor is it desirable he should. The name has unfortunately come to be associated all but exclusively with a method yielding a certain class of results; but it has no necessary connection with these results. 'Higher Criticism,' rightly understood, is simply the careful scrutiny, on the principles which it is customary to apply to all literature, of the actual phenomena of the Bible, with a view to deduce from these such conclusions as may be warranted regarding the age, authorship, mode of composition, sources, etc., of the different books; and everyone who engages in such inquiries, with whatever aim, is a 'Higher Critic,' and cannot help himself. The peculiar distribution of the names of God in Genesis, *e.g.*, is a fact to be recognised, whatever account may be given of it, and the collation and sifting of evidence, with the view to the obtaining of a satisfactory explanation, is, so far, a critical process. There is nothing in such scholarly examination of the Bible, even though the result be to present some things in a new light, which need alarm anyone. As the world of nature presents a different aspect to the man of science, still more to the metaphysician, from that which it does to the common view of sense, yet is the *same* world; so the Bible may present a somewhat different aspect to the eye of the trained critical scholar, yet is the *same* Bible, for edification, devotion, and instruction in the way of righteousness."

If one who is generally acknowledged to be the ablest of recent opponents of " extreme " criticism, and who was, moreover, so doughty a champion of Evangelical orthodoxy, could write like that, there is little need for anything more to be said on that particular point. Dr. Orr recognised, what many of those who quote him do not, that criticism has come to stay, and that, although in the hands of some who use it, the critical method has been carried to unjustifiable lengths, the critical view of the Bible has ousted the traditional view as surely as the Copernican astronomy ousted the traditional geocentric conception of the universe.

Incidentally, Dr. Orr refers in a footnote to the late Rev. G. H. C. Macgregor, the well-known and widely revered Keswick leader. Have you ever read Macgregor's biography ? It is a charming book, and it gives a very vivid portrait of a saintly personality, the finest flower of that intensive culture of the spiritual life for which the Keswick Movement stands. Macgregor had been brought up in the traditional school. At the University he found himself compelled to face up to the newer views that were then coming into prominence through the teaching of Robertson Smith, A. B. Davidson, and other scholars. At first, like many another, he was greatly disturbed, and feared that the foundations of his faith were being undermined. But he soon came to see that the foundations of God stand secure. " I was trained up," he writes, " in the strictest possible way to believe in the verbal inspiration of the Bible. But the faith that was the result of this training utterly gave way, and for a time I lost all faith in the Bible as inspired. But . . . I began to see that

the inspiration of the Bible did not lie so much in its being a miraculously accurate book, as in its being a book written *from God's point of view*." Again, "Dr. Davidson is making the Old Testament a new book to me. It is becoming to me so much more Divine, my belief in its inspiration is ten-fold strengthened, and that by the very man whom a large number of our worthy people wanted to oust from his post as being one of the 'higher critics,' for the dire offence of seeking to find the truth in regard to the people of God, and His revelation to them." It was in this newly, and more firmly established faith that Macgregor went forth to the ministry in which he was so richly blessed and so widely used.

Whether, holding such views, Macgregor would be as cordially welcomed to the Keswick platform to-day, I am not so sure. I very much fear that a reactionary spirit has prevailed, and that a note of intolerance has been allowed to creep in, that scarcely harmonises with the ideal of spiritual fellowship for which the Movement stands. It is a profound pity that the great motto of the Convention, "All one in Christ Jesus," is made to carry the addendum, by implication, if not by direct statement, "provided you pronounce Shibboleth exactly as we do." It would be matter for deep thankfulness if the supporters of that and similar Movements would realise that the deepening of the spiritual life, and whole-souled devotion to our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, are not the exclusive prerogatives of those who accept a particular theory of Biblical inspiration.

Mention of George Macgregor reminds me of the somewhat similar case of Henry Drummond. He, too, was one who frankly accepted the newer teach-

ing, both in the realm of Biblical criticism and in that of evolutionary science, and, in consequence, he was suspect in many quarters, and was often bitterly assailed as an enemy of the Faith. But do you remember the testimony of D. L. Moody, a stalwart upholder of the old views if ever there was one? Moody had little sympathy with many of Drummond's views, but he said of him, "Never have I known a man who, in my opinion, lived nearer the Master, or sought to do His will more fully. No man has ever been with me for any length of time that I did not see something that was unlike Christ, and I have often seen it in myself, but not in Henry Drummond."

P.S.—I wonder if you know Dr. Paterson Smyth's little books, *How we got our Bible*, *How God inspired the Bible*, *The Old Documents and the New Bible*, and *Our Bible in the Making*? It is many years since they were first published, but you can often pick them up for a few coppers on a second-hand book-stall. They are full of most interesting facts concerning the actual structure and history of the books of the Bible. It would do you good to read them. Dr. Smyth is the author of the fascinating *People's Life of Christ*, a book of which even so stalwart a fundamentalist as Dr. Dinsdale Young has spoken in terms of most enthusiastic praise. If, therefore, he is a safe guide in the interpretation of the supreme subject of the Bible, you need not fear to listen to what he has to say about the Bible itself.

IX

SCHOLARS OR SAINTS?

ALTHOUGH my last letter was somewhat lengthy, it dealt with only one of the points you raised in your previous letter to me. Without, therefore, waiting for your reply, I will supplement it by dealing with another, and very important point. You said that my whole argument is vitiated by one salient fact which I have so far ignored, the fact, namely, that the Bible is an *inspired* Book. All that I have said about the rights of literary and historical criticism may be true and legitimate if its subject matter is ancient secular literature, such as, *e.g.*, the poems of Homer. But the Bible is in a different category altogether. It is not the product of old-time literary genius: it is the inspired Word of God. Hence it stands on an entirely different footing, and must be approached in an entirely different way. Its interpretation needs a spiritual equipment far more than an intellectual one, however valuable the latter may be. That this is so is abundantly proved by the fact that many a humble-minded child of God, with no outstanding intellectual ability, and with no knowledge of, or interest in, critical problems, has nevertheless got to the heart of the Bible message, and through "knowing the Holy Scriptures" has become "wise unto salvation." And you end your argument by

saying that what the Church needs is not scholars but saints.

Before I attempt to deal with your main argument I would make a brief comment on your last sentence. Are you not suggesting an entirely false antithesis? It would be a poor look-out for the Church if the alternative were scholars *or* saints. Scholars *and* saints is surely far nearer the mark. No one can read Christian history without realising that one of its outstanding glories is its noble records of saintly scholarship, or scholarly sainthood. Think of Paul, Jerome, Augustine, Bede, Anselm, Luther, Calvin, Leighton, to say nothing of the multitude who have "followed in their train" in more recent times. And don't forget that the simple-hearted devotional reader of the Bible, with no knowledge of, or concern with, critical problems, would have no Bible to read if the scholars had not burnt the midnight oil, and toiled through weary years to master those problems. After all, whatever may have been the method by which the Word of the Lord "came" to the original writers, certain it is that our English versions did not "fall, as heavenly manna, down." We owe them entirely to the scholars and critics, and hence the cheap sneers at "scholarship," that are so popular in certain quarters, are simply a revelation of the bigotry and ignorance of those who indulge in them.

At the same time there is solid justification for much that you say. There is, as we rejoice to know, a spiritual wisdom of the saints that does not in the least depend on mental ability or profound learning. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. And the Church has always recognised that fact, and insisted

on its importance. She has never feared to remind her "wise and prudent" that, for them, as much as for the "babes," the truth holds good, and that none who ignore it can hope to enter into the deepest secrets of the spiritual life. That is the meaning of the old saying, *Cor facit theologum*—it is the heart that makes the theologian.

But regarding the former part of your statement, something further needs to be said. First of all, even though the Bible be inspired literature, it is *literature*, and we have no ground or warrant whatever for saying that, as such, it is *altogether* different from all other literature, and that it presents no problems that cannot, or must not, be dealt with by the ordinary methods of literary investigation and research. The Bible is a sacred book, but it never claims to be sacrosanct, nor are we justified in making the claim for it.

When Dr. Benjamin Jowett, the famous Master of Balliol, laid down the dictum that we should read the Bible as we read any other book, it was generally thought that he was saying an irreverent and almost blasphemous thing. But calmer consideration has shown that his words were wise and true. Nor need we shrink from their fearless application. For one thing, the surest way to convince men that the Bible is *not* like any other book is to get them to read it as though it were. If they do, they will almost inevitably make the discovery that the Bible has a certain unique quality of its own, describe it how they will, that differentiates it from all other literature, sacred or secular. But again, Dr. Jowett's dictum is valid from the fact that the Bible, quite apart from its distinctive spiritual message, deals with

facts of human life, and of human history, and deals with them through the ordinary media of human writings. In so far as these *are* facts, they are open to be dealt with as we deal with all similar facts. *There is no other way in which we can deal with them.*

There still remains, however, the larger question : What exactly do we mean by the inspiration of the Bible ? We are so familiar with the phrase that we are apt to take it as being self-explanatory, and to imagine that the phrase itself answers all questions that can be asked about it. But the issue is by no means so clear. For one thing, it is well to remember that the Bible itself says very little about its own inspiration. I have just been looking through a book that is one of the most trenchant and thoroughgoing defences of the verbal inspiration theory that I have ever come across. The writer builds up most elaborate arguments in support of his particular view, but he makes the following significant admission : " It is, however, somewhat remarkable that, while the spirit of inspiration breathes on every page, and illumines every word of Scripture, as we shall hope to show, the actual word ' inspiration ' only occurs twice in the whole Bible—viz., Job xxxii. 8 and 2 Tim. iii. 16. As to the divine method of inspiration—*i.e.*, the manner in which God communicated His thoughts and words to the writers of the Scriptures—there is really very little indeed to help us."

These words are quite true, but they carry an implication that is quite overlooked by this writer, and by many others. Surely where the Bible itself is so reticent, we have no right to be dogmatic.

Even the most devout Bible student is not justified in building an elaborate superstructure of his own theorisings, and then saying, in effect, "The Bible says very little about the meaning or method of its inspiration, but *this* is what it means, and anyone who thinks otherwise is disloyal to the Bible."

When we turn from the theorists to the Bible itself, we find some very interesting information. We are told that "the Lord spake unto" certain men, but no detailed explanation is given as to how He spake. Many Old Testament writers assert that "the word of the Lord came" unto them, but they do not tell us how it came, and they also write many things for which they do not make that claim. A New Testament writer tells us that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," but he does not elucidate the pregnant phrase he uses. Paul asserts that "every Scripture inspired by God is profitable," but he elaborates no doctrine of inspiration. He asserts the reality of the fact: he does not offer any explanation of it. He proclaims its purpose, not its method.

Now I do not think it follows from this that the Church has done wrongly in seeking to elaborate a doctrine of her own on the subject, or even that it is wrong for the individual Bible reader to do so. The attempt to formulate such a doctrine was both legitimate and inevitable. We live in a world of facts, and the human mind is so constituted that it cannot help seeking an explanation of the facts that come into the realm of its experience. Theories and doctrines are the product of such attempts at explanation. The same principle holds good in both

the secular and the sacred realms; with scientific and with religious truth. The sun has been a fact in human experience from the beginning of human history, and the wonder and significance of that fact have always deeply impressed the human mind, which has reacted to it by its attempts at explanation. Earlier explanations were very crude, but they served their purpose until they were displaced by larger and truer conceptions, which in turn led on to the more exact theories of modern science. But not even the most dogmatic and self-assured of modern scientists would claim that the last word has yet been said on the subject. The fact is a bigger thing than all the theories about it, ancient or modern. So in the realm of religion. The fundamental fact of Christian experience is the fact of redemption. Theories of the Atonement are the product of Christian meditation on the meaning of that fact, and consequent attempts to explain it. But we all realise that the fact is a bigger and more vital thing than all the theories about it, or all the forms in which the doctrine has been given formal expression. So, again, the Christian Church has always been vividly and proudly conscious of the fact that her Sacred Writings possess a unique interest, value and power, and it is only natural that she should have done her best to explain that uniqueness. The various theories of inspiration are the product of her attempted explanations. But it should be clear that, this being so, all the theories, ancient and modern, orthodox or unorthodox, from the most mechanical dictation theory to the most rationalistic theory of the modern critical school, are human speculations, and as such have no more

authority than that of their own intrinsic worth. That is to say, we ought individually to give our allegiance to that theory which we honestly believe to offer the most satisfactory explanation of the fact concerned, but do let us realise that the authority of the theory, in that sense, is quite a different thing from the authority and reality of the fact itself. All this is even more strikingly manifest with the doctrine of inspiration than it is with the other doctrine we have mentioned, that of Atonement. Theories of the latter are also speculations, as all theories are, but in this case they have a wealth of Biblical teaching to build upon, and hence they are also expositions. But with inspiration the definite Biblical teaching is so meagre that there is little material for exposition, and the speculative element is consequently more marked.

When we study the subject historically, a very significant fact comes to view. Not only is it clear that the Church has never been in complete agreement in her doctrine of inspiration, but also it is clear that the pre-Reformation Church never regarded it as a fundamental doctrine. This is all the more remarkable when we remember how doctrinal were the interests of the Church in the early centuries, and how much of her time and strength were given to the formulation of the great doctrinal and credal statements of the Faith. The Church had to contend for the Faith, both against the assaults of the current pagan philosophies, and also against heretical teachings within her own borders. The great Creeds, each of which was the outcome of prolonged theological disputation, sought to summarise and crystallise essential Christian truth—the funda-

mentals—knowledge of which, and acceptance of which, were regarded as necessary for salvation. None of those historic Creeds includes an article regarding the doctrine of inspiration. If, therefore, such a doctrine was not a "fundamental" during the most rigidly fundamentalist ages of the Church, when orthodoxy was considered to be of such vital importance that any departure from it was regarded not only as a sin, but also as a crime to be punished with the utmost severity, some of us find it a little difficult to believe that it can be as vitally important to-day as you and your friends believe.

I am not suggesting that the doctrine was regarded as unimportant, for obviously it was not. An unquestioning belief in the reality of the fact of inspiration was the basis of all Scripture exposition, and of the doctrinal statements of the Creeds. But that increases rather than lessens the significance of the omission from the Creeds of any statement about inspiration. In later post-Reformation times, when more elaborate and detailed statements of doctrine were drawn up, the case was different, especially among the Reformed Churches. In the famous Westminster Confession of Faith, for example, the first section deals at considerable length with the subject of Holy Scripture. And that is typical of the post-Reformation view-point, although it is worth remembering that not one of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England deals with the inspiration of the Scriptures. The point I want to stress for the moment, however, is that until the time of the Reformation the Church never formally and authoritatively defined the doctrine.

In books that deal with the subject it is usual to quote statements of outstanding leaders and theologians of early times, some of whom held very rigid and extreme views on the matter. Such statements are interesting and valuable, but only as giving us the personal opinions of the men who made them. Some seek to support the verbal inspiration theory by quoting from the old Jewish Rabbis, who often said very striking things about the sanctity of every jot and tittle of the Sacred Books. For example, "Take heed how thou doest thy work (as a scribe) for thy work is the work of heaven, lest thou drop or add a letter of the manuscript, and so become a destroyer of the world"! Such quotations are interesting as revealing the current Jewish conceptions; but can we forget that it was exactly that rigid insistence on the sanctity of the letter which so hampered our Lord in His work, and moved Him to indignant protest?

Another puzzling question which emerges when we study the subject in its historic setting is this: if the issue for the Church was as clear and definite as you assume, and as it would have been if the books of Scripture were *altogether* different from all other writings, why did the Church have such difficulty in the formation of the New Testament Canon? Many folk to-day imagine, or even definitely assert as a truism, that the books of the New Testament were written *as* Scripture, and that they gravitated together immediately and naturally—or rather, supernaturally—and were from the first recognised and acknowledged as divine in origin, and in a class by themselves. It is, in fact, difficult to imagine how anything other than this could have happened, if the

verbal inspiration theory, or any similar theory, is correct. But the facts utterly disprove any such view. The facts, mark you, not the fanciful theorisings of modern critical scholars. If you will take the trouble to read any history of the Early Church, whether it be written by a modern scholar, or, better still (in order that there may be no suspicion of "modernist" bias), a translation of the writings of the early historians, such as Eusebius, you will make an interesting discovery. You will find that the books of our New Testament were for a long time in circulation singly, or in little groups, side by side with many other writings which were almost, if not quite, equally revered and valued. And when the Church came finally to collect them together—forming the Canon, as we call it—there was by no means unanimity of opinion as to what should be included, and what excluded. There were other Gospels in circulation in addition to our Four, and although many of them were fantastic and extravagant fictions, some, like the Gospel of Peter, were highly honoured and widely used. The Epistles of Barnabas and of Clement of Rome, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Apocalypse of Peter, and the Acts of Paul were all widely accepted and used in the services of the Church. Some of them are definitely referred to as "Scripture." On the other hand, the Church was for long uncertain about some of the books that finally were recognised, such as Hebrews, Second Peter, Second and Third John, and James. I must refer you to histories of the subject, such as Souter's *Text and Canon of the New Testament*, for fuller details, but the point is that it was not until the fourth century that the New Testa-

ment was finally settled in the form and order in which we have it. Even then there was not complete unanimity, for in the Eastern Church, then so important, the book of Revelation did not secure unquestioned recognition until much later.

In the light of these facts, is it not certain beyond the possibility of dispute, that the Early Church, whilst firmly believing in the reality of inspiration, had no clear and definite standard of definition of it? Also it is clear that whatever was the test by which the Church made her final decision, it could not possibly have been a verbal test. Do we know what that test was? Not exactly, though certain points are fairly definite. It is clear, for example, that special value was placed on any writing that had come from the hand of an Apostle, or from one who was in close association with an Apostle, as Luke was with Paul, and Mark with Peter—Mark is described in the earliest records as "the interpreter of Peter." Though here, again, there was a perplexing problem in the fact that the Church was by no means certain of the genuine apostolic authorship of some writings that bore apostolic names—an interesting sidelight, by the way, on the "critical" acumen of those early scholars. But the final decision about doubtful and problematical books was almost certainly reached by the Church "sensing" their quality. Books that had stood the test of experience, that had been helpful to Christian life and thought, and that were in harmony with the spirit and teaching of other books that were unquestionably apostolic, won acceptance for that reason. The test, in a word, was of the spirit, and not of the letter.

And that, again, should be full of instruction and warning for us to-day, for it is the highest test *we* can apply.

This letter is already far too long, so I must continue the subject when next I write.

X

THE BIBLE IN PROTESTANT THOUGHT

FOLLOWING up my last letter, I should like to say something more about the doctrine of inspiration, and the place that it has taken in Christian history. The Reformation, of course, marks the great dividing line in that history, and it was an event that not only affected Christian organisation, but also Christian thought. One of the great questions involved was that of Authority. The Catholic Church said, and still says, that Authority is vested in the Church, and supremely in the Pope, who is the Vicar of Christ. The Reformers repudiated that claim, and sought another ground of Authority. They found it in the Bible. Not in the sense that they regarded the Book itself as the supreme arbiter, infallible, inerrant and divine. That idea was a later development of Protestant thought, as we shall see in a moment, and Chillingworth's famous summary of the position, "The Bible, and the Bible only, the Religion of Protestants," is hardly an accurate statement of the view-point of the Reformation pioneers. Neither Luther nor Calvin was content to build on the foundation of an infallible *Book*. They dug down deeper, and based everything on the reality of spiritual experience, the presence of Christ Himself with His people, and the witness of the Spirit in the believing soul. Luther's famous

reference to the Epistle of James as "an epistle of straw," or his suggestion that Hebrews was written, not by Paul but by Apollos, is eloquent as to his attitude. Even more significant is the way in which Calvin deals with the matter in his *Institutes*, "where he makes it clear that what he sets over against the idea of an infallible Church is the reality of an ever-present Spirit in contact with the minds of the truly devout." But if the "Religion of Protestants" was something more than "the Bible only," it is equally true that the Bible was given a position in Protestant thought that was very different from its position in the Catholic Church. In the Bible the Reformers had found their charter of freedom. It was in the teaching of the Book that they discovered the great spiritual truth on which they took their stand. The Catholic Church also acknowledged the divine authority of Scripture, but she insisted that that authority was valid only as it was mediated and interpreted by the Church. The Reformers insisted that the authority and claims of the Church must themselves be judged by the higher authority of Scripture. With Catholicism the last word was with the *Church*: with Protestantism it was the teaching of the *Book*. The issue having thus been joined, its development in a particular way was inevitable. Each party naturally tended to strengthen its own claims. Hence, in the Roman Catholic Church, the doctrine of Church and papal authority was further developed until it reached its logical climax in the promulgation of the Dogma of Papal Infallibility in 1870. On the other hand, the Protestant Churches, again inevitably and logically, put increasing emphasis on the authority of the Bible.

The trend of their thought is not at all difficult to understand, or to appreciate. The Reformers had re-discovered the Bible, and the glory of the Good News of God that the Bible proclaims. In the teaching of the Book they found all that they needed, both for thought and life, and none can deny that they made noble use of their discovery, and of their new-found freedom of access to the Book and its message. What more natural than that the Book, whose divine power and worth they were increasingly realising, should become increasingly an object of veneration, and that they should make for it great claims? The Reformers, and their successors, would not have been worthy of their inheritance if they had not done so. The Bible was to them God's Book, and they honoured it as such. Hence it is not in the least surprising to find that the claims made on behalf of the Bible became ever more definite and thoroughgoing, even to the point of claiming for it complete verbal inerrancy, and infallible divine authority in every detail. Protestantism owed so much to the Bible that naturally it believed that it could not claim too much for the Bible.

But although all this was a perfectly natural and inevitable development, and recognising that it was inspired by the purest motives of gratitude and devotion, it is still open to us to inquire if it was completely justified in all the forms it took. It is no dishonour to the Reformers, or to their successors, and it is not failing in adequate recognition of the outstanding value of their service to the cause of true religion, if we examine their conclusions, and ask if, granting that their valuation of the Bible was true, their interpretation of the Bible, and of its

nature, was always accurate. Especially so, as we find that, in the course of time, an increasing emphasis was put upon the *letter* of Scripture. In other words, that the development of Protestant thought was not consistently in the line of true progress. In the famous Westminster Confession of Faith (1643), the first section, consisting of ten articles, is "Of the Holy Scripture." Those articles teach "high" doctrine on the subject, but it is noteworthy that they stress the point on which Calvin insisted, that "our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the word in our hearts." In the Helvetic Confession (1675), however, we find a far more rigid insistence on the authority of the *letter* of Scripture, even to the extent of claiming divine inspiration for the Hebrew vowel-points, though those grammatical devices were not invented by Jewish scholars until many centuries after the last book of the Old Testament was written. Again, many distinguished seventeenth-century theologians committed themselves to such statements as that, to speak of grammatical errors or solecisms on the part of the New Testament writers was a blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, or that, to stress the variant readings in the ancient manuscripts bordered on atheism—and this in spite of the fact that nothing is more certain in the realm of Biblical scholarship than that the New Testament writers certainly did not all write pure and faultless Greek (was it to be expected that they should, or could?), and that the textual variants are numbered by the thousand. From all this it is clear that post-Reformation

theories of inspiration are just as much speculations of the human mind as were pre-Reformation theories, and we need offer no apology for submitting them to the same scrutiny and examination. They are either true and adequate, or they are not. If the former, they have nothing to lose, but everything to gain, from such scrutiny. If the latter, the sooner we examine them, and discover their inadequacy, the better, in order that we may replace them by something more satisfying.

But to come nearer our own day. When, in the seventies and eighties of last century, the English Revision Company was engaged on its great task, it met with considerable opposition in certain quarters. Obviously, if the doctrine of a perfect and infallible Bible were true, the very idea of revision savoured of irreverence, and many so regarded it. The objectors found a vigorous champion in Dr. Burgon, of Oxford, afterwards Dean of Chichester. He was a great Patristic scholar, and a doughty and even virulent controversialist. The story of his onslaughts on the Revisers, and especially on their chairman, Bishop Ellicott, makes interesting and amusing reading. It was as thrilling an exhibition of verbal fisticuffs as modern theological controversy can show. I refer to it because of one statement that Dr. Burgon made in the course of the discussion. "Every book of it (the Bible), every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High." After that, of course, there was nothing more to be said! One cannot conceive how the verbal inerrancy and infallibility theory could be stated more definitely,

unequivocally and dogmatically. It was a fitting and triumphant culmination to the process that had been going on for three hundred years.

Now we all know that a statement made with intensity of conviction seldom fails to carry conviction to many who hear it. And that was so with the statement I have just quoted. Many earnest Christians felt, and many still feel, that a statement made like that by a man of Dr. Burgon's standing must be true. And they rejoice in it, using it as a shield to quench all the fiery darts of criticism and unbelief. But if, before allowing ourselves to be convinced in that way, we pause to ask for evidence and proof, we shall make an amazing discovery. *There is none, not a single jot or tittle.* Dr. Burgon's statement is mere dogmatic assertion. Not a single *fact* can be produced to support it. I daresay you will accuse me of falling into the same extravagance of statement that I have criticised in others, but I can quite confidently invite you to test the accuracy of what I say. I know, of course, that you can point me to such definite statements in the Bible as Rev. xxii. 18-19 and 2 Tim. iii. 16, or that you can refer to the fact that the whole Bible is called the Word of God, which surely carries the implication that everything in it is " the utterance of the Most High." But I would remind you of one or two important points. First, the statement in Revelation, however we may interpret it, obviously refers only to that particular book—" the words of the book of this prophecy," as the writer puts it—and it is a gratuitous assumption to suggest that, because that book happens to be placed last in our Bibles, we are justified in referring the words to all the

books that precede it. Again, even if we read Paul's words as we have them in the Authorised Version, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and not as in the Revised Version, we have no justification for reading into them more than the Apostle says. To say that if all Scripture possesses this indefinable quality that we call inspiration, it *must* mean that every word and letter is of divine authorship, is again a pure assumption. It *may* mean that, but the Apostle certainly does not say so, and all the definite evidence that we do possess tells against that interpretation of his words.

And yet again, with regard to the familiar phrase "the Word of God," are you quite sure that we have justification and authority for using it as we do? Let me quote an illuminating passage from Dean Farrar: "Not once throughout the New Testament is the Old Testament called the Word of God; not once throughout all Scripture is the Bible called the Word of God, though the phrase itself occurs between 300 and 400 times. In the Old Testament 'the word of Jehovah' is always applied to some particular prophetic message or messages, which in their collective form may be called (by way of figure, as John Damascene says) 'oracles of God,' because they contain such oracles. In the New Testament the facts and oral preaching of the Gospel are called 'the word,' 'the word of hearing,' 'of truth,' 'of salvation,' 'of reconciliation,' 'of grace,' 'of the kingdom,' and are therefore rightly regarded as a word or message of God, and about God; but in all these instances the reference is *not to written books at all*, still less to the entire contents of sixty-six written books, out of which some twelve

or more were only with hesitation admitted as Deutero-canonical. Even as applied to the Gospel message the phrase is used in a secondary sense. In its true and supreme sense the title 'the Word of God' is applicable to Christ and to Christ alone. Luther pointed out long ago that 'God does not reveal grammatical vocables, but essential things. Thus sun and moon, Peter and Paul, thou and I, are nothing but words of God.' And we may, with Hartley Coleridge

> Believe that every bird that sings,
> And every flower that stars the elastic sod,
> And every breath the radiant summer brings
> To the pure spirit, is a word of God.

But Christ alone is '*the* Word of God.'"

Dr. Farrar goes on to point out that the identification of the Bible in its whole contents with the very Word of God has never been countenanced by the Christian Church as a whole, although this has been done, in comparatively recent times, by some sections of the Church, and by some individual theologians. He quotes the saying of John of Damascus, a great pillar of orthodoxy in the eighth century, "We apply not to the written word of Scripture the title due to the Incarnate Son of God." I leave you to ponder the significance of these points. If you would like an elaboration of them you can find it in Dean Farrar's book *The Bible, its Meaning and Supremacy*, or in any similar book that deals with the same theme. Dr. Peake's *The Bible, its Origin, its Significance, and its Abiding Worth* is an admirable survey of the whole subject. Dr. Marcus Dods's *The Bible, its Origin and Nature* is another.

All these books are written by devout believers. And there are many others.

But to return to Dr. Burgon. I have often wondered if anyone had the temerity to suggest to him that, although he was using devout Christian phraseology, he was expounding the Moslem, and not the Christian, doctrine of inspiration. Had anyone done so, he would have been stating the fact, though one can well imagine his being overwhelmed by the tornado of wrath that the doughty Dean would have let loose upon his innocent head. The Mohammedan believes that the *Koran* is a Divine Book, in the most definite sense. Its original, the real *Koran*, is in heaven. Thence it was communicated, chapter by chapter, to Mahomet, being dictated by the Archangel Gabriel. On one occasion, Mahomet tells us, Gabriel showed him the heavenly book in its entirety. In the Prophet's last address to his followers he said, " Verily I have fulfilled my mission, I have left among you a plain command, the Book of Allah, and manifested ordinances, which, if ye hold fast, ye shall never go astray." Verbal inspiration is an orthodox Moslem doctrine : *it is not a Christian doctrine, however devoutly it may have been held by many Christians.*

There are many other lines of argument that I could suggest to you. Let me mention only one. Take the opening words of Luke's Gospel, in which he states so clearly his object and method in writing. He tells us—I quote from Dr. Moffatt's version—" Inasmuch as a number of writers have essayed to draw up a narrative of the established facts in our religion exactly as these have been handed down to us by the original eye-witnesses who were in the

service of the Gospel message, and inasmuch as I have gone carefully over them all myself from the very beginning, I have decided, O Theophilus, to write them out in order for your excellency, to let you know the solid truth of what you have been taught." Now that passage makes it perfectly clear that if Luke were a "living and writing pen" of the Holy Ghost, to quote Gregory the Great's description of the Bible writers, he himself was quite unconscious of it. If he were conscious of it, it would have been almost blasphemous irreverence on his part to conceal the fact, and to give Theophilus the impression, as he certainly did, that the compilation and writing were his own. If, on the other hand, he were such a "pen," it is impossible to conceive how he could have failed to be conscious of it, at least in some measure. Hence, with all due respect to Gregory, and to the multitude of earnest Christians who, since his time, have advocated some form or other of the verbal inspiration theory, I personally refuse to plead guilty to the charge of being "disloyal to the Bible" because I prefer the Bible's own testimony. Whatever inspiration means it does not, and cannot, mean something that is directly contradicted by the Bible's own facts and witness.

I have again reached the reasonable limits of a letter without getting nearly to the end of what I wanted to say. I must therefore ask you to allow me again the serial story writer's privilege, and to say "to be continued in our next."

XI

DEAN FARRAR *VERSUS* THE APOSTLES

I AM in the midst of the further letter I promised, but I break off to deal with the challenge you present me in your brief note just to hand. You say, "It is Dean Farrar *versus* the Apostles, and I prefer the latter. See 1 Peter i. 25 and Eph. vi. 17. The Word of God *does* mean the Bible. Surely the meaning of "word" is clear enough. We find no difficulty or ambiguity about it in ordinary speech, and why should we try to impart an entirely different meaning to it, and rob it of its obvious meaning, when we find it in the Scriptures?"

Well, let us look at the matter a little more closely. First of all, let me assure you that I had not overlooked the two New Testament passages to which you refer. I cannot see, however, that they controvert Dean Farrar's statement; it seems to me that they very definitely support it. But I will deal with that point in a moment. Let us look first at "word." It is true that we find no difficulty about its use in ordinary speech, though even there it is not quite free from ambiguity. We ordinarily use the term to denote a single component part of speech, made up, when written, of letters and syllables which represent the articulate sound, and which express an idea or ideas. Words, in this sense, are the elemental instruments of speech and

writing, the bricks, of which we build the structure of language, written and spoken. Now, if "word" only and always means this, then a phrase like "the Word of God" must have a verbal reference, and it must be interpreted as a collective term, equivalent in meaning to "the *words* of God." That, I take it, is what you are asserting. If the Bible is the Word of God, then its words are the words of God: it is simply two ways of saying the same thing.

A moment's consideration, however, will surely make you realise that even in ordinary speech "word" does not always carry this unambiguous meaning. I have heard you refer to a sermon as "a very helpful word," while such expressions as "he pledged his word," or "he brought word," are commonplaces. Obviously, then, "word" is not always simply the singular of "words"; it sometimes means the truth or the ideas to which "words" seek to give expression. When, for example, we speak of "the word of truth" we obviously mean something very different from "the word truth." Hence it is not surprising, nor should it be at all perplexing to us, that we find "word" used in the Scriptures in this larger and fuller sense. There is obviously not the slightest verbal reference in the great Prologue to the Fourth Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory." You may point out, quite fairly, that this is a special case, and that it is open to question if the English translators acted wisely in rendering John's word "Logos," which is a philosophical term,

by the English "Word." Logos is not the Greek term for "word" in the ordinary sense. The normal Greek term is "rhema," which bears the same general meaning as our "word," and it is this term that is used in such phrases as "the word of the Lord," or "the word of God." That is quite true, but even so, it is worth while to look a little more closely at the actual use of the term in such phrases. Take the two outstanding passages to which you refer. Peter says, quoting from Isaiah, "the word of the Lord endureth for ever." Do you seriously suggest that that great assertion means that the *written words* of the Lord endure for ever? If it does, then the assertion is simply not true, for many of the original written words of Scripture had not endured to Peter's day, let alone our own. But if "the word of the Lord" means, as surely it does, the eternal truth and everlasting wisdom of God, then we can see that prophet and apostle were proclaiming the glorious verity upon which faith builds with confident assurance. Or, to put it in another way, if "the Word of God" and "the Bible" mean the same thing, then the terms must be interchangeable. Apply that test to Peter's declaration. "All flesh is as grass . . . but the Bible endures for ever, and this is the Bible which by the Gospel is preached unto you." Contrast that with this: "All flesh is as grass . . . but the Truth of God endures for ever, and this is the Truth which by the Gospel is preached unto you." The first rendering is obviously so inadequate that it comes perilously near bathos, the second rendering thrills.

The same thing is manifest when we look at the

passage in Ephesians, where the Apostle gives us a vivid description of the soul's armour. "And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Now no one who knows anything of Christian history, or of Christian experience, can question that the Bible is a veritable sword of the Spirit in the hands of the faithful, and in the light of the Christian experience of the centuries it is little wonder that the Apostle's words have been appropriated and applied in that way. At the same time, such application is an adaptation, albeit quite apt and legitimate, of the words, rather than an exact exposition. For one thing, it is not a pedantic quibble to point out that it would be somewhat incongruous to include in the *spiritual* armour of the *soul*, as part of its equipment for its *spiritual* warfare, a material thing like a book, even though it be a sacred book; especially so as every other piece of the armour is expressly described as a *spiritual quality*—the girdle of *truth*, the breastplate of *righteousness*, the shield of *faith*, the helmet of *salvation*, etc. Moreover, your interpretation implies that any Christian who does not either possess a Bible, or have free access to one, lacks an essential and vital part of the soul's *spiritual* equipment; which is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the indisputable fact that vast numbers of Christians who have valiantly taken their part in the spiritual warfare, have not had that privilege, and in many cases could not have made use of it if they had. We cannot divide the Christian host into two sections, and claim that those who possess Bibles are on a higher level of *spiritual* attainment than those who do not, because they alone possess the complete

armour of the soul. To possess a Bible is a great Christian privilege, but the Bible itself is not part of our *spiritual* equipment, though it may be a most valuable means to that end. No, the "sword of the Spirit," the weapon of attack by which foes are vanquished in the spiritual combat, is "the word of the truth of the Gospel." There is really not much difficulty in the matter. All that is necessary is to bear in mind that there is a vital and essential distinction between *Word* and *words*. The latter are one of the means by and through which the former is expressed. Words are material symbols, the Word is the spiritual truth that, at best, can only be partially and inadequately expressed by such symbols. The words of Scripture are human; the Word of Scripture truth is divine. The words are the bricks and stones of which the lighthouse is constructed; the Word is the light that shines forth.

P.S.—Just a few words on a minor matter. You refer to my quotation from Dr. Moffatt's version, and ask if I think it desirable that the attempt should be made to supersede the old and well-established versions by these individual translations by modern scholars. Frankly I do not—if it is a question of superseding. But Dr. Moffatt would be the first to repudiate the idea that his version had any such purpose. It would be an irreparable loss if the Authorised Version were ever superseded, for it is one of the glories of our national literature. But not even its most fervent admirer would claim that it is a perfect translation, and therefore it can with great profit be supplemented by more modern translations which are able to make use of our far

wider resources of knowledge concerning the early manuscripts. The wonder is that the Authorised Version is as good as it is, especially when we remember that its compilers did not have access to what are now acknowledged to be the three oldest and most valuable of the ancient manuscripts, viz., the Codex Vaticanus, the Codex Alexandrinus, and the Codex Sinaiticus. Modern scholars are able to make full use of those old documents, and many others that recent research has brought to light, and our knowledge is correspondingly enriched.

Nor can any valid objection be brought against the individualistic nature of Dr. Moffatt's, Dr. Weymouth's, or similar translations. Both our Authorised and Revised Versions were the work of a company of scholars, and it may be true that " in a multitude of counsellors there is wisdom." But we should never forget that the basis of the Authorised Version was the earlier version of William Tyndale, the greatest name in the records of English Bible translation. King James's translators found that they could make comparatively little improvement on Tyndale's work, and in the New Testament alone they incorporated about ninety per cent. of his actual words and phrases. Tyndale was the " Dr. Moffatt " of his day. He gave to his generation a " New Testament in Modern Speech." Moreover, we find the same thing on the Mission Field. The great Bible Societies have issued hundreds of versions of Scriptures in native languages. The vast majority of them are the translations by individual missionaries into the everyday speech of the peoples among whom they work. Hence any

objection that may be taken to Dr. Moffatt's work lies equally against all such missionary translation work; and I hardly need remind you that the latter is one of the most glorious of modern Christian achievements, and that it needs no defence.

XII

DIFFICULTY OF DEFINITIONS

CONTINUING my discussion of the doctrine of inspiration, I want to anticipate a criticism that you may quite fairly pass on what I have so far written. You may point out that I have spent a good deal of time in criticising the older, and still widely accepted views, and that I have done my best to prove their inadequacy. I have said much about what inspiration does *not* mean, but have made no attempt to say what it *does* mean. You may well ask if I have any better and more satisfactory explanation to put in place of those that I discard, or whether I am content to leave the whole matter in the mists of uncertainty. Let me admit at once, and with all frankness, that I am not able to offer you a clear-cut and unequivocal definition of the meaning and method of inspiration, nor do I know of any "modern" scholar to whom I can refer you for one. If the satisfactoriness of a view or interpretion depends on its unequivocal definiteness, then I frankly admit that the advantage is with you, and that "the old is better." But is that a true test? Do we not find in many realms of experience that there are truths that are too big to be comprehended in their entirety in any rigid definition? Who, for example, can adequately define human love? The very attempt to give it definition

would prove that the one who made the attempt was altogether missing its deeper meaning. So with inspiration. The modern dissatisfaction with the older theories is not due, as you imagine, to an unbelieving and unspiritual attitude of mind that is unwilling to recognise the wonder and glory of the fact of inspiration. On the contrary, it is due to a fuller recognition of that wonder and glory, and the more clearly they are recognised the more certain it becomes that no rigid definition is, or can be, adequate.

When Henry Drummond died, and the question of the writing of his biography was being discussed, one of his friends said that to write his life-story would be like "writing the history of a fragrance." I do not know that one can come closer to the heart of the meaning of inspiration than that. It is a fragrance—real, certain, unmistakable, but altogether intangible and indefinable. We *know* that the Scriptures are inspired, not because Church Councils have authoritatively defined the doctrine, or even because the Scriptures themselves assert the fact, but because, when we read them, we "sense" their fragrant quality as certainly as we sense the fragrance of a rose garden. The botanist or the horticulturist may tell us much about the roses, but can they define, or adequately describe and explain, the fragrance? In the realm of human thought we speak of the inspiration of the poet or the painter. Many of the greatest poets have believed, humbly and reverently, that their muse was inspired by the Divine Spirit. Milton prays:

> Inspire as Thou art wont
> My prompted song else mute.

And Pope likewise :

> Do Thou my soul inspire,
> Who touched Isaiah's lips with hallowed fire.

And even if we had no such acknowledgment on the part of the poets themselves, we recognise that in all true and great poetry there is a mysterious spiritual quality for which the best word that we can find is inspiration. But who can define it ? If, then, we believe that the inspiration of the Bible writers was on a higher level still, and that it possessed a unique quality that cannot be paralleled in even the noblest achievements of human genius, how much the more is it impossible to give that uniqueness adequate definition.

As far as the Bible writers themselves are concerned, most of them say nothing about their inspiration, and lay no claim to that lofty experience. Their writings became incorporated in the Sacred Volume because later generations " sensed " their quality, and not because of any claims to pre-eminence put forward by the writers themselves. In some cases, however, we do find definite assertions and claims, particularly in the Prophets. Their favourite formula is " the word of the Lord came." Some describe their call to the prophetic ministry, and make it clear that they laboured in the definite conviction that their message was from God. Jeremiah especially tells us very fully of his experience. The word of the Lord came to him telling him that before his birth he had been appointed a prophet to the nations. He shrinks from the task, pleading his youth and inexperience. But he is encouraged to go forward. " Then the Lord put

forth His hand, and touched my mouth ; and the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth."

In view of such a statement as this it is very difficult for us to understand why the Jews placed the prophetic writings on a distinctly lower plane of inspiration than that of the Law. We find it easier to place the Prophets at the apex of the Old Testament revelation. But, even so, we are not to interpret Jeremiah's words with "wooden" and prosaic literalness. It was not that at a particular point of time God ordained him to the ministry, and gave him the assurance that henceforth he was to be a mere mouthpiece for the utterance of the literal words of God Himself. What we have is the prophet's vivid summary of his experience : the burden of constraint that came upon him, the realisation that all the circumstances of his birth and upbringing had been preparing him for his life-work, the sense of personal unfitness, and the growing confidence that God would be his sufficiency. Jeremiah went forth to his work an inspired man. We speak of inspired *writings*, but we are far truer to the Bible's own testimony when we speak of inspired *writers*, "*Holy men* of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." John Wesley comments on that passage that under such "moving" the writers were "purely passive," but if "moved" is a passive verb, "spake" is not, and surely the implication of the words is of a "moving" that resulted in a super-normal activity of thought and speech. Men were moved, stirred in the very depths of their being by the Divine Spirit, their minds illumined, their emotions quickened, their

thoughts stimulated. Then, in their own way, and in their own words, they sought to give expression to what had been revealed to their inner consciousness in those inspiring experiences. But just because they were men, and not mere automata, or passive and unconscious instruments, they were subject to inevitable human limitations and imperfections. To recognise this fact—and it is patent on every page of Scripture—is not to degrade the Bible, but to exalt it. It helps us to see the sacred book as it really is. Too long the Bible has been looked at through spectacles of our own manufacture, and too often the lenses have not been clear and true. We have formulated our theories of what inspiration *ought* to mean, and then we have interpreted the Bible in the light of our theories. Is it not wiser, and more reverent, to accept the Bible's own self-testimony?

Moreover, if we do so, we shall find that we are almost entirely freed from the problem of "Biblical difficulties." Nearly all the arguments of Tom Paine, Bradlaugh, Ingersoll, Blatchford, and their followers, simply collapse in the light of the Bible itself. Against the verbal infallibility theory of the Bible many of those arguments are not only cogent, they are unanswerable. If we assert that everything in the Bible is divinely perfect, inerrant and infallible, and that it is literally the "Word of God," the unbeliever has the easiest task imaginable in pointing out discrepancies, contradictions and faulty moral conceptions in the Book. And he is perfectly justified in so doing. There are such discrepancies and contradictions, and much of the morality of the earlier books is very imperfect indeed. If God is the

Author of every word, then there is a great deal of justification for even the blasphemous things, as the Christian feels them to be, that the infidel says about God. But if we take the Bible as it is, recognising it to be a collection of writings that come to us from different human hands, and from a very extensive period of human history, we shall find, what we should naturally expect to find, that it marks different stages of human development, with correspondingly different levels of human culture. We shall find primitive conceptions in primitive times. We shall find the record of a slow moral progress from lower conceptions to higher. But in that record of progress we shall also find clear and unmistakable evidence of a divine leading and education, and of a progressive revelation of divine truth to human minds. The admixture of human imperfection and error will be no difficulty to us: the problem would be if we did *not* find it.

I recently came across an indignant protest by a fundamentalist leader to the effect that "so-called 'Christian' scholars are now saying what Tom Paine said." The worthy man took it as evidence that modern scholarship has simply joined hands with infidelity in order to strengthen the infidel attack. It has "sold the pass." But that is altogether to misread the situation. By "saying what Tom Paine said" modern scholarship has not strengthened the infidel argument; it has demolished it. The infidel points out certain *facts* concerning the Bible, and he has no difficulty in proving that those facts are irreconcilable with many of the claims that Christians have put forward on behalf of the Bible. And it is this glaring discrepancy between fact and

claim that gives him ground and justification for his attack. Modern scholarship says that the only thing that really matters is the *facts*, and that the Bible should be judged by its facts, and not by the claims that have been made on its behalf, whether by friend or by foe. As it was not the *facts* of the Bible that infidelity attacked, but only a particular interpretation of those facts, modern scholarship has rendered the inestimable service of making that particular kind of attack for ever impossible.

One of the wisest teachers that God ever gave to the Church was Bishop Butler, author of the *Analogy*, which for nearly two hundred years has been one of the great classics of Christian orthodoxy. In one passage of that famous book, Butler says, " We are in no sense judges beforehand by what method and in what proportion it were to be expected that this supernatural light and instruction would be afforded us. The only question concerning the authority of Scripture is whether it be what it claims to be, not whether it be a book of such a sort or so promulged as weak men are apt to fancy a book containing a Divine revelation should. And therefore neither obscurity, nor seeming inaccuracy of style, nor early disputes about the authors, nor any other things of the like kind, though they had been much more considerable than they are, could overthrow the authority of Scripture, unless the prophets, apostles, or our Lord had promised that the book containing the Divine revelation should be secure from these things." That passage has often been quoted, and it certainly " hits the nail on the head." It is somewhat remarkable, and certainly regrettable, that with all the care that has been given for genera-

tions to the study of the *Analogy*, the significance of that passage has been so strangely overlooked. Had its elementary truth been recognised, a great deal of misunderstanding would have been avoided, and the Christian Church would have been saved from much controversy, both within her own borders, and with the sceptical world.

There is, however, something more that needs to be said. If we describe the inspiration of the Scriptures as their indefinable fragrant quality, we are looking at the matter from the point of view of the reader. That is how the reader senses inspiration. But from the point of view of the writers we must supplement that description. Note that I say description, not definition. What, then, did inspiration mean to the Biblical writers ? Can we tell *how* they were inspired ? No, we cannot. None of them tells us with sufficient definiteness to enable us to make a dogmatic assertion on the matter, nor have we sufficient definite evidence from any other quarter. But a careful study of their writings does suggest a probable and reasonable explanation. The word that best describes it is, I think, illumination, or insight. The significance of those ancient writings for us is largely in the fact that they reveal such wonderful insight into spiritual truth. Take, for example, the historical narratives of the Old Testament. They would be of abiding interest for us even if they were nothing more than bald records of historical facts. But there is something more in them. Even the most prosaic of them has a distinct quality of its own. That quality is not that of miraculous accuracy. We have no warrant whatever for supposing that, as historical writers, the Biblical historians

followed any other method than the usual, and in fact inevitable, method of historical compilation. They collected, sorted, classified and arranged the available material, and made the best use they could of it. When a writer in, say, the sixth century B.C. recorded events of the twelfth or fourteenth century he did not receive his information by supernatural and miraculous revelation. He made use of the information that had come down to his own day through earlier writings, or by oral traditions and legends. Every other ancient race had such traditions and legends: why should we imagine that the Hebrews were an exception? Is it in fact possible or conceivable that they *could* have been an exception? While as to earlier writings, do you realise that the Bible writers themselves quote by name no less than ten non-Biblical works from which they draw information? They are *The Book of the Wars of Jehovah*, *The Book of Jasher*, *The Book of Nathan*, *The Book of Gad*, *The Book of Iddo the Seer*, *The Book of Jehu*, *The Book of Shemaiah*, *The Acts of Solomon*, *The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah*, and *The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel*.

The distinctive feature of the work of the Biblical historians was not that past events were miraculously revealed to them—none of them makes any such claim, or even suggests it—but that they wrote from a definite and distinctive point of view. They had, albeit in varying degrees, a wonderful *insight* into the meaning of the story they record. They wrote *religious* history, not simply in the sense that they wrote about religion, but in the deeper sense that they saw a religious significance in historical events. They traced the workings of a Divine leading and

overruling in the nation's affairs. If any one whose deeds they are recording acted rightly, they do not speak, as we should, of his obeying his conscience: they say he "did according to the word of the Lord." If he acted wrongly, he "did not hearken unto the voice of the Lord." In a word, they see God in everything. We find the same thing, though on a far higher level, in the writings of the Prophets. Their amazing insight into the deeper moral and spiritual significance of human affairs, their clear conception of the inexorableness of the working of moral law, and their profound conviction that, for nations and for individuals, "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will," place the Prophets among the outstanding moral and spiritual geniuses of the world's history. We lower the whole conception of prophecy when we think of it chiefly as the foretelling, in exact and minute detail, of future events. Its unique features were its wonderful insight into moral and spiritual issues, and its noble and fearless *forth-telling* of the Divine purpose. I venture to suggest that if you, or anyone else, could remove from your mind all preconceived ideas about the Bible, and could read it as it is, and let it make its own impression on your mind, that impression would be this: you would be profoundly convinced that the writers of these books were men whose minds were so illumined that they had a wonderful insight. That would not be the only impression, but I think it would be the outstanding one. Now, is not that just what we mean by inspiration? Can we, indeed, hope to get much nearer to the heart of its meaning?

If this is so, does it not lift the whole matter to a

higher level than that on which we usually discuss it? If inspiration mean anything like this, then obviously we need not waste our time in the discussion of such petty matters as the accuracy of every detail, or the infallibility of every statement. To think of inspiration as guaranteeing the inerrancy of every recorded fact, and of every statement of the Biblical writers, is to degrade it to a mechanical level, and to rob it of its *inspiring* quality. To think of it as the operation of the Divine Spirit on human minds, not in order to raise them above all human limitations, and to free them from all possibility of error, but to quicken their moral and spiritual sensibilities, and to enable them to understand and to proclaim spiritual truth, is to have a conception of inspiration that is at once God-honouring and man-inspiring. Any theory of inspiration that makes it a matter of a miraculous endowment that guarantees freedom from all possibility of human error and imperfection, involves the de-humanising of its subjects. The men who wrote must have been so de-humanised if they were the channels or instruments of such miraculous operations, for so long as they retained and made use of their human qualities they could not have escaped the limitations that are an inevitable and essential aspect of those qualities. But we have the Bible's own testimony that it was *men* who were "moved by the Holy Ghost," and we have no hint or suggestion that they ceased to be men under the influence of such "moving."

XIII

"THE SCRIPTURE OF TRUTH"

Your last letter certainly pulls me up sharply, and gives me furiously to think. I have made frequent references to the discrepancies and inaccuracies in the Biblical narratives, but I have not elaborated the point in any detail. The reason was that I assumed that it was a point that hardly called for argument. I took it for granted that every Bible reader admitted the existence of such imperfections, although all do not follow the same method in explaining them. It therefore came as a bit of a shock to read your assertion that "some of us do not admit that there are any errors in the Bible, beyond a few that are obviously mistakes of copyists." You refer me to Mr. Sidney Collett's book *The Scripture of Truth*, which, you say, expounds the position that you and your friends are proud and satisfied to hold; and you assure me that if I will read that book I shall find that my objections are very definitely answered. Well, let me make a frank confession. I have had that book on my shelves for a good many years past, and I have read it more than once. I even quoted from it in an earlier letter to you.[1] I have always regarded it, however, as an interesting literary curiosity. Please do not think that I use that phrase in any offensive sense. The whole-souled devotion and earnestness of the writer are apparent on every page

[1] *Cf.* p. 67.

of his book. It is obviously written by a man who loves his Bible, and who is deeply concerned for it. And to those qualities I pay my unstinted tribute of respect and admiration. But his love for the Bible leads him to make many claims and assertions which, *in the light of the actual facts*, are positively amazing, and it is for that reason I describe the book as I do. I have always regarded it as a personal confession of faith on the part of the writer, and as such deserving of all respect, but I had not realised that the point of view he was advocating had so many adherents. I admit that I ought to have realised it, if only from the fact that my own copy is of the sixth edition, the previous five having been sold out within four years of the original publication. However, your kindly rebuke has led me to reread the book in a chastened mood. I have also taken note of some of the press reviews, One says, " It is a marvel of clear, compact information and vigorous argument . . . one of the very best defences of the traditional view of the Bible that has ever been written." And there are many others in the same strain. In the preface to the sixth edition the author also says that the large sale of the book " is proof that, in spite of the blasphemies of the so-called ' New Theology,' and other less pronounced forms of destructive criticism, there are yet many who love the old paths, and refuse to give up their faith in the inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God."

I take it, then, that I may regard the book in question as a widely accepted and authoritative exposition of the fundamentalist view-point. That it *does* contain a wealth of interesting information and cogent argument is obvious to the most unsym-

pathetic reader, and I will endeavour to give that argument fair and frank consideration. Well, then, let us see what your chosen champion has to say on the particular point with which I set out to deal in this letter. He tells us, in the opening passage of his section on "Apparent Contradictions," that on one occasion during a sea voyage he got into conversation with a medical officer, who said to him, "The Bible is full of mistakes and contradictions." He continues, "I asked him, as there were so many mistakes in the Bible, would he kindly show me a few of them? But the only reply I could get from him was, 'It's full of them, it's full of them.' I then placed my open Bible in front of him, and, in the presence of another passenger, said, 'If you can show me one mistake or contradiction in that Book I will give up the whole thing.' Of course, as in nearly all such cases, he knew absolutely nothing of the Bible itself, but had been reading what German critics had said about it."

I think that is really the most amazing passage I have ever come across in all my reading on this subject. I wonder what your author would have done if the medical officer had taken up his challenge! Why he didn't, I cannot conceive, for I should have thought that any intelligent schoolboy could have done so. Certainly if he *had* been reading any German criticism he would have had not the slightest difficulty in so doing.

Your author then goes on to say, "At the same time it is undeniable that there are *some* passages which, when compared with corresponding passages, *do appear at first sight* to be contradictory, but it

may safely be said that *in all such cases* the difficulty may be traced to one of two causes, viz.:

"1. Either the passages in question have not been studied with the individual and personal care and prayer which this Book demands. This carelessness lies at the root of nearly all the supposed difficulties that we hear about. *Or*,

"2. As it does happen *in a few cases*, a mistake has been made by an early copyist in writing out the ancient documents in our possession." (The italics are mine.)

Now beyond any question these two lines of explanation are sufficient to deal with many of the difficulties, though to speak of copyist's errors as being found "in a few cases" is very misleading. "Few" is, of course, a comparative term, but one is hardly justified in using it in this connection in view of the indisputable fact, to which I have before referred, that the verbal discrepancies in the ancient manuscripts are to be numbered by the thousand. But even so, to assert that *all* the difficulties can be explained as due to one or other of these two causes is to say what simply is not true. In the parallel historical narratives of the Old Testament, for example, there are a great many discrepancies that simply cannot be explained in either of these two ways. Or, to take a more important case, the Four Gospels have never yet been completely "harmonised," in spite of all the devotion and scholarship that have been given to the task throughout the Christian centuries. The Resurrection narratives still baffle all attempts to reconcile them in every detail. They certainly would have been harmonised long since, if the

application of these two principles was all that was necessary.

Let us look, however, at the way in which Mr Collett applies his own method. I admit that he has the courage of his convictions, though he is hardly justified in implying, as he does, that he has dealt satisfactorily with the *whole* question by his detailed examination of eight or nine cases. However, we will deal with his first case, that of David numbering the people. Chronicles gives the number as 1,570,000, while Samuel gives 1,300,000. On the face of it there is an obvious discrepancy. The ordinary reader, who was not looking at the matter through the spectacles of a verbal inerrancy theory would not, however, be greatly troubled by it. He would take the common-sense view that the respective historians, writing at different times, drew on different sources of information, which, while agreeing in the main fact, differed in detail. Not so Mr. Collett. He points out that "if we read *carefully* we shall see that Chronicles says that 'All Israel were 1,100,000 men that drew sword,' while Samuel says 'there were in Israel 800,000 *valiant* men that drew the sword.' In other words, we learn that out of a total fighting force of 1,100,000 men, 300,000 could not be counted among the *valiant* ones, and therefore they were purposely omitted from Samuel's list, which deals with that class only. As regards Judah, somewhat similar details are given; for while Samuel states that '*the men of Judah* were 500,000,' Chronicles merely gives the 'men *that drew the sword*' as 470,000. So that in this case, 30,000 evidently drew not the sword, and were therefore non-combatants."

Now all this is wonderfully ingenious, but is it *satisfying* to any reasonable mind? For one thing, it is certain that the original Hebrew gives no warrant whatever for these subtle distinctions. "Men of valour" and "men that drew the sword" are commonplace expressions for what we should call "soldiers," and they are used interchangeably, together with a number of other similar terms. The Hebrew word translated "valiant" is actually used in the Old Testament, in over fifty instances, for "army." Hence, the expression "men of valour," or "valiant men," is clearly only a synonym for "men of the army," and it does not in the least convey the suggestion of a *special* bravery. In a word, from the point of view of strict exegesis, the suggested explanation of the discrepancy will not hold good for a moment. But even supposing that this conclusive objection could not be brought against it, are we seriously to believe that God is the Author or Inspirer of both statements and that, of set purpose, He inspired the writers to give the figures in these two ways, without any hint of explanation beyond the subtle and ambiguous implication of one or two particular words? Do we really honour God, and treat Him with due reverence, by attributing to Him the authorship of ingenious, and *useless* puzzles? I stress the word *useless*; for what is the position? For centuries this "apparent contradiction" has stood in the records, a perplexity to the faithful, a stone of stumbling to the inquirer, and an object of scorn to the scoffer. And at long last the solution of the puzzle is discovered, and it is a solution which is not of the least practical value to anyone, even if it were true!

Moreover, you will not fail to notice, I hope, that your author, while expending considerable care on his attempt to explain the discrepancy of the numbers, makes no reference whatever to the far more serious discrepancy in the two narratives. Samuel says very definitely that God moved David to number the people, while Chronicles says that Satan did so. Which is right? I know that all kinds of attempts have been made to reconcile this contradiction, but they all fail when brought up against the actual words of the Hebrew Scriptures, where we find the two quite definite and distinct assertions. The only reasonable explanation is that the respective historians *interpreted* the incident in different ways, and from different view-points. The Bible itself does not attempt to harmonise the discrepancy, neither in this nor in the very considerable number of similar cases; nor are we called upon to do so. As a matter of fact, we should never think of wasting our time in making the attempt, if it were not that we persistently refuse to take the Bible *as it is*. Admit the discrepancies, and they cease to be difficulties. Deny that they are discrepancies, or seek ingeniously to explain them away, and the difficulties are magnified ten-fold.

In another passage of his book, Mr. Collett commits himself to this challenging statement: "If the Bible is verbally inspired there should be—there can be—no errors in it; for God could not make a mistake. In regard to (this) proposition it should never be forgotten that, in spite of all the critics have said, no error or contradiction of any kind has ever been proved to have existed in the Scriptures as originally given by God." The latter part

of this statement is perfectly true, and it sounds very convincing. But its value and force are *nil*, for the simple reason that the opposite statement can be made with equal truth. It has never been proved that there were *not* errors and contradictions in the Scriptures as originally written. Both statements are alike incapable of proof in the strict sense of the word, for we have no certain and complete knowledge of the original documents upon which alone such a proof could be based. But, as Bishop Butler said long ago, probability is the guide of life. There are many things that are incapable of exact *proof*, but which may nevertheless be supported by such a mass of presumptive evidence that their probable truth cannot reasonably be questioned. So with regard to the Bible. We know nothing *directly* of the original documents, but we know a great deal *indirectly*. The later copies that we do possess, even though they be copies of copies of copies, to the *n*th degree, do provide us with a great deal of presumptive evidence. *The whole of this evidence points in one way.* When every allowance is made for copyist's errors, and later interpolations, the fact remains that there is not the slightest evidence, real or presumptive, to support the assertion of an original perfection and inerrancy. On the contrary, all the evidence points definitely the other way. If the originals were inerrant, then the blunders and vagaries of the copyists and scribes must have been far more numerous and careless than even the most drastic modern critic has ever dared to suggest.

I acknowledge again the earnestness and devotion that prompt your champion to make that assertion,

but does he not, in making it, defeat his own end? Even if his assertion were true, it would only mean that he had removed one difficulty by creating another that is far greater. His argument is that God "gave the Bible" originally in a form that was perfect, and free from all error and contradiction. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we grant this. Well then, it follows that God who was so concerned that men should possess His truth in a perfect way that He performed the miracle, for such it would be, of shielding the writers from all possibility of error, nevertheless quite forgot to look ahead, and to make any provision for the retention of that perfection in the Book that He was thus miraculously giving. I know it sounds almost irreverent to put it like that, but the conclusion is inescapable. Nothing is more certain than that, even if the original writers were guarded from all possibility of error, none of the later copyists were. Hence the original miracle, if such it were, availed nothing. Again I say it in all reverence, do we really honour God by attributing to Him conduct which in a human being we should condemn as lacking in ordinary prudence and forethought? Surely it is more reasonable, and more reverent, to believe that the Book that most certainly has not been miraculously *preserved*, was not miraculously *given* free from error? The Bible itself gives no hint or suggestion that it was so given, and the only effect of our making the claim on its behalf is that we forge another weapon for the unbeliever to use in his assault upon the Bible.

I am quite willing to believe that the book we have been considering is "one of the very best

defences of the traditional view of the Bible that has ever been written," and I can well understand that its arguments appeal strongly to those who are anxious to support that view. But I am sure that those arguments would have precisely the opposite effect on the reader of inquiring mind who is not concerned about any particular view, but who is anxious to know the facts. It is possible to "protest too much," and that is what your author does. I am reminded that Robert Blatchford tells us that what first set him on the path of scepticism was his reading of Thomas Cooper's book, *The Verity of Christ's Resurrection from the Dead.* That was a popular Christian Evidence book, and its line of argument was very satisfying to many believers, but it did not equally satisfy inquirers. So with Mr. Collett's book. In spite of its sincerity and devotion it raises far more difficulties than it solves. It is a defence of a *view* of the Bible, not of the Bible *itself.*

There is an elementary principle that is too often overlooked in religious discussion when we are eagerly defending our *views.* It is that we can never serve the cause of the Truth by saying things that are not true. If a statement does not accord with the facts it is not true, and no amount of earnestness, sincerity and devotion in the saying of it can make it true. Many things that your author says are earnest, sincere and devout, *but they do not accord with the facts.*

XIV

BIBLICAL EDITORS

I TURN to another of the objections that you bring against what I have written in the course of this correspondence. I said in an earlier letter that the critical study of the Bible was a " movement that has been going on for nearly two hundred years." You challenge that statement, and describe it as an example of the extravagance of modern critical writers. Well, I admit that it was an extravagant statement, though not in the way you think. I should have been nearer the truth if I had said that the history of Biblical criticism stretches away back over considerably more than *two thousand* years. There are certain characteristics of *modern* criticism that *are* modern, although even so, we must remember that " modern " is a relative term, and what we call the modern movement in Biblical research had its beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century. But one of the most certain and assured results of modern critical study is the discovery that what we call criticism was freely indulged in by the Jewish custodians of the Sacred Writings long before the dawn of the Christian era. The form and order in which the Old Testament has come down to us is the result of the free critical handling and arranging and revising of the original records by the pre-Christian scribes. The Old

Testament, as we know it, is an "edited" collection of books. To a considerable extent this is obvious, and has never been questioned by the most orthodox and fundamentalist scholarship. It is obvious, for example, that the actual arrangement of the books in the order in which we have them *is* an arrangement. Not even the most careless reader could imagine that the Old Testament grew by the addition of book after book, commencing with Genesis and going slowly on until Malachi completed the list. The books are obviously sorted out and arranged in a particular way, which clearly is not that of the exact order in which they were written. Such arranging is the work of an editor or editors. You find exactly the same thing in the New Testament. For instance, the Epistles of Paul are arranged in a purely artificial order, according to their respective lengths, and not at all according to their chronological sequence or their subject matter. The editorial hand, or hands, is clearly manifest in such arrangements, and the fact is so obvious that it does not call for comment. What is not so obvious to the casual glance, though it is equally obvious and indisputable when we look carefully at the facts, is that many of the books themselves have been similarly edited, and that what has come down to us is not a collection of books in the exact form in which they left the hands of the writers whose names they bear. On the contrary, many of those books show clear and unmistakable evidence of *internal* rearrangement and editorial revision. It is very clear, for example, that the Book of Isaiah is not a unity that comes from an individual writer. The section of the book that commences with the

fortieth chapter is quite distinct from what precedes it. "In a book called by the name of the prophet Isaiah, who flourished between 740 and 700 B.C., the last twenty-seven chapters deal with the captivity suffered by the Jews in Babylonia from 598 to 538, and more particularly with the advent, about 550, of Cyrus, whom they name. Are we to take for granted that Isaiah himself prophetically wrote these chapters, or must we assign them to a nameless author or authors of the period of which they treat?" (G. A. Smith on "Isaiah" in *The Expositor's Bible*). Of course it is *possible* that "Isaiah was carried forward by the Spirit out of his own age to the standpoint of one hundred and fifty years later; that he was inspired to utter the warning and comfort required by a generation so very different from his own, and was even enabled to hail by name their redeemer, Cyrus" (*ibid.*). But if so, we are presented with a phenomenon without parallel in the history of Holy Scripture. Moreover, we note that even the earlier part of the book does not claim to be all of Isaian authorship. "On the contrary there is considerable testimony in the opposite direction. The Book of Isaiah is not one continuous prophecy. It consists of a number of separate orations, with a few intervening pieces of narrative. Some of those orations claim to be Isaiah's own: they possess such titles as 'The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz.' But such titles describe only the individual prophecies they head, whilst other portions of the book, upon other subjects, and in very different styles, do not possess titles at all" (*ibid.*). Again, there are passages which, by implication at any rate, are not by Isaiah, for they speak

of him in the third person, while in other narratives he speaks of himself in the first person. Hence there is strong presumptive evidence that the whole book is not *necessarily* by Isaiah, nor intentionally handed down by its compilers as the work of that prophet. "Now, when we come to chapters forty to sixty-six, we find that, occurring in a book which we have just seen no reason for supposing to be in every part of it by Isaiah, these chapters nowhere claim to be his. They are separated from that portion of the book, in which his undisputed oracles are placed, by a historical narrative of considerable length. And there is not anywhere upon them or in them a title nor other statement that they are by the prophet, nor any allusion which could give the faintest support to the opinion, that they offer themselves to posterity as dating from his time. It is safe to say that if they had come to us by themselves, no one would have dreamt for an instant of ascribing them to Isaiah" (*ibid.*).

Now these are not fanciful theorisings of modern critical scholars; they are the facts presented to us by the book itself, where they are patent to anyone, fundamentalist or modernist, who will take the trouble to read the book carefully. What implication do the facts carry? Surely this, and the conclusion is really inescapable, that the book, *in the form in which it has come down to us*, is an edited compilation. But, you may ask, are there no counter-facts that refute this suggestion? No, there are not. All that can be put on the other side of the scale is that the book bears Isaiah's name, and hence has been traditionally ascribed to his authorship, and that quotations from the book in

the New Testament are given as from the prophet Isaiah. Naturally they would be, for the whole book was then known by his name, but that fact is not an argument that outweighs, or even touches, the unanswerable argument provided by the facts of the book itself. The study of the book itself—not, I stress again, of fanciful modern theories about it, but of *the book itself*—provides clear and indisputable evidence that the Jews did not shrink from dealing *critically* with their Sacred Writings. And this is but one instance out of a multitude. The Pentateuch is a still more striking and obvious instance. But before dealing further with that example, I should like to stress one other point with regard to the Book of Isaiah. You will not, I hope, have overlooked the fact that we have been discussing the *structure* of the book, not its *message*. The latter is not in the least affected by any argument about the former, or rather, the message becomes more easily understandable in the light of a fuller knowledge of the structure. That fuller knowledge certainly removes one of the most puzzling difficulties that the Bible contains. The great "Comfort ye, comfort ye" chapter is beyond question one of the noblest passages in the prophetic literature, and it does not require much imagination on our part to picture the thrill and the inspiration it must have brought to the despondent exiles, as it proclaimed the end of their tribulation, and the glory of their triumphant return to their own loved land. But the traditional view of the book requires us to believe that that thrilling exhortation was actually written one hundred and fifty years before it was needed, or before it had, or could have, any

point or practical meaning. There it lay, for a hundred years or more before the Exile, a cryptic utterance, waiting for the time to come when circumstances would give it meaning and value. The question is not whether God *could* have performed the miracle of so inspiring the prophet as to enable him to write in this way, but whether it is conceivable that He *would* have done so. Christian faith believes that God can, and does, perform what we call miracles, but Christian reverence prevents us from believing that He ever performs unnecessary or useless miracles. Is it not obvious that if the "Comfort ye" passage had been a familiar part of the nation's prophetic writings for some generations before it was needed, its very familiarity would rob it of point, and of the power to thrill, when it *was* needed? The miracle, in a word, would have defeated its own end.

If, however, we give heed to the facts that the book itself sets before us (and I have only mentioned a few of those facts: there are many others, all pointing to the same conclusion), we shall find it almost impossible to ignore the implication of those facts—viz., that the book as we have it is an edited compilation consisting of narratives about Isaiah, and the recorded prophecies or oracles of that great prophet; together with later narratives, and prophetic utterances of an anonymous prophet, or prophets, of the period of the Exile itself, such later narratives and prophecies being incorporated with those of, or concerning, Isaiah himself, because in the judgment of the editors they were in harmony with the spirit and purpose of Isaiah's words and

work, and, in fact, were their full-orbed complement and sequel. The book nowhere claims to be a unity from the hand of Isaiah, nor does it offer any evidence, actual or presumptive, that justifies us in making that claim. Is there, therefore, any valid reason why we should not give due weight to these facts that a careful study of the book brings so clearly to light? They *may* disturb the traditional view that was the outcome of a less careful study, but if we have a real love and reverence for the Scriptures, surely we shall be far more anxious to know, and to give heed to, what the Scriptures themselves say, than to what subsequent generations have said about them. Modern critical study is usually thought of as giving us new *ideas* about the Bible, and it is for that reason disliked and denounced by lovers of the old ways. But it only gives us new ideas by bringing to light old *facts*. To take a simple analogy: the earth *was* round during all the long ages in which men had the *idea* that it was flat. The new and revolutionary idea of the earth's rotundity was the product of a more careful observation which brought to light the old *fact*. The new idea was very disturbing, but only to the older ideas that were the result of a faulty understanding of the fact. So precisely is it with all the modern study that is bringing the *facts* of the Bible into clearer light. It is to me a matter of ever-increasing wonderment and puzzlement that any Christian who loves his Bible, and who knows by experience its divine power and worth, can fail to welcome with humble and devout gratitude the new light upon the old facts that is

being so richly given to us in these days. As far as Bible study is concerned, we certainly live in days of high privilege, for an amazing wealth of larger knowledge has been placed at our disposal. Is it a worthy and Christian attitude that we take when we assail with denunciation and abuse the toilers who have gone down into the mines and dug out that wealth for us? To speak of such toilers as "pulling the Bible to pieces" is as ludicrously far from the truth as it would be to describe the work of a botanist who by careful and patient investigation is able to give us fuller and more exact knowledge of the well-loved flowers in our gardens, as "pulling the flowers to pieces." It is true that we do not need the exact and detailed botanical knowledge before we are able to appreciate the flowers, and to enjoy their beauty and fragrance, but such knowledge may greatly increase our power to appreciate and to enjoy. Moreover, it is quite likely that such knowledge will demonstrate that many of our previously held ideas are wrong. The botanist may be able to demonstrate that some flowers that we had thought to be akin are of quite distinct species, or *vice versa*; but when the *facts* were clearly brought to our knowledge we should never think of denying them because they did not tally with our previously held ideas, nor should we cry out in alarm that our garden was being destroyed. So is it with the Bible. A great deal of Bible reading is not Bible *study*. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that Bible study has two distinct forms. Much of our ordinary devotional reading and study of the Bible is like walking

through a flower garden. Our purpose is not to acquire technical knowledge, but to enjoy the beauty and fragrance, and we can secure that enjoyment even though we may be almost entirely ignorant of such technical knowledge. But we should not forget that a great deal of our enjoyment is due to the fact that others have sought such knowledge, and applied it. We may know little of the principles of botany and horticulture, but we should not have the garden to enjoy unless the botanist and horticulturalist had given us the benefit of their knowledge and toil. It is easy for the most ignorant of us to buy a packet of seeds of some new variety of flower, and to sow them, and enjoy the result; but how were the seeds provided for us? *By the botanical and horticultural "Higher Critics."*

I have not written half of what I intended to in this letter, so again I must say "to be continued in our next." But before I leave the subject of Isaiah—which, by the way, I have only been dealing with as a specimen case to illustrate the general principle that is involved—I should like to suggest to you a simple little test. Read the book through on your assumption that it is a unity that comes to us from the hand of Isaiah himself. You will find it full of music, but, to continue the figure, you will hardly fail to notice the somewhat puzzling fact that the singing voice varies. Sometimes it is a bass, sometimes a baritone, sometimes a tenor. There is no question about the beauty and harmony of the melodies, but it is certainly puzzling to find the varieties of voice. Then read the book again on the opposite assumption that it is not a unity, but a

compilation, and hence that the varieties of voice are due to there being more than one singer. Then write and tell me if you can honestly say that in the second reading you found less of harmony and melody than you did in the first.

XV

MOSES AND THE PENTATEUCH

In my last letter I dealt at some length with the Book of Isaiah and its problems. Let me now say something about the Pentateuch, the so-called books of Moses, which are, of course, the chief "battleground" of Old Testament criticism. The traditional view of the five books which form the opening section of the Bible, and which the Jews held to be by far the most important of the three divisions of their Sacred Writings, is that they were written by Moses. That great leader and law-giver was one of the two or three greatest men that the Hebrew nation produced, and his name was, and is, deservedly held in highest honour. Long before the time of Christ the national traditions concerning Moses had crystallised, and they dominated the national thought on all matters of religion and Scripture interpretation. Moses was the first national historian: under divine inspiration he wrote the story of the Creation, and of the patriarchal history down to his own time. He was not only *a* law-giver, or the *first* law-giver, he was *the* law-giver, and the whole of the elaborate and detailed ritual and legal codes were the product of his inspired authorship. In short, not only was it true that "the Law was given by Moses," but the whole of the five books of the Law were written by him. Such was the Jewish

tradition, and it was taken over without question by the Christian Church, and has persisted in many quarters down to our own day. It is, in fact, still the popular idea that the first five books of the Bible are literally the "books of Moses." I notice that Mr. Collett, in *The Scripture of Truth*, even improves on the Jewish tradition, by claiming that Moses actually wrote the account of his own death and burial, including the added comment, "No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day"! That is to say, Moses was actually inspired to write beforehand the comment that later generations might want to make concerning his tomb! We find many elements in later Jewish tradition that are not free from a touch of absurdity, but the most authoritative tradition did not quite go to that length. A famous Jewish Talmud tract, *Baba Bathra*, after saying that "Moses wrote his own book," goes on to give details of the authorship of the other Old Testament writings (incidentally stating that "Hezekiah and his company wrote Isaiah, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes," which is an interesting sidelight on what I said in my last letter about the non-Isaian authorship of the Book of Isaiah). Then follows this statement, "Eight verses which are in the Torah Joshua wrote: for the reading is, 'And Moses the servant of the Lord died there.' Is it possible that Moses should have in his lifetime written the words 'And he died there'? Was it not that Moses wrote so far, and from that point onward Joshua wrote?"

Such then is the ancient tradition concerning these five books of the Law. They were accepted as the books of Moses, and "Moses" is even used

as an alternative title for them, such a phrase as "Moses and the Prophets" being equivalent to the alternative title "The Law and the Prophets." Obviously a tradition so ancient and venerable, and one, moreover, that for long ages was never questioned, deserves respectful attention, and is not to be lightly dismissed. "Tradition" is not a synonym for "Truth," but nevertheless a tradition may be true. Certainly we have no right to discard a tradition unless we are quite sure it is *not* true, especially so when it is one that has many sacred associations. But a tradition is always a legitimate subject of investigation. Even a sacred tradition is not sacrosanct, and our concern for the truth justifies us in asking—nay, compels us to ask—Is the tradition true? As I have said before in another connection, it is either true or not true. If the former, it has nothing to lose, but everything to gain, from a full investigation. If the latter, the sooner it is investigated the better, in order that its falsity may be revealed, and the real truth established. A baseless or false tradition, however ancient and venerable it may be, and however sacred its associations, is a "cumberer of the ground." Therefore modern scholarship need offer no apology when it makes its inquiries into the validity of this particular tradition, nor is it open to the charge of unbelieving irreverence in so doing.

Let us then ask what are the *facts* behind the tradition. We begin by looking at the books themselves, and immediately we make some most interesting discoveries. The first, and most striking, I would illustrate by a little story. When, about fifty years ago, the battle over the Higher Criticism was

raging fiercely in this country, a certain bishop who was vigorously opposing the newer teaching, somewhat rhetorically asked what the critics would answer when in the next world Moses met them with the challenge, "How dared you say that I did *not* write the Pentateuch?" A famous Hebrew professor drily replied that it was equally reasonable to put the question in the opposite way, and to imagine Moses asking the bishop, "How dared you say that I *did* write the Pentateuch?" In other words, the first discovery we make when we study the books themselves is that they do not bear Moses' name. And they are not only anonymous, but also they do not offer us the slightest evidence to justify the claim that they are of Mosaic authorship. That in itself is not, of course, a final settlement of the problem. Other evidence *may* be available to prove that Moses was the anonymous author, but, if so, we shall have to look outside the books themselves for it. We certainly do not find any such evidence *in* the books. We know that later generations *called* them the books of Moses, but if we did not know of that later tradition, and did not allow ourselves to be more or less unconsciously influenced by it, we should certainly never gather from our study of the books themselves that Moses was the author. Again let me stress that this is not a matter of fanciful modern theorising. You can test it quite simply for yourself by reading through, say, the Book of Genesis, and carefully noting every passage that even implies its Mosaic authorship. At the end of such a reading you will find that the number of passages that you have been able to note is exactly *nil*.

Further, a careful reading of the books concerned brings to our notice a great many passages and statements that certainly *imply* that Moses could not have been their writer. For example—I quote a brief summary from Dr. Peake—" In this connection attention has often been called to the passage in which Moses is praised by the writer as very meek above all men living. Added to this, we have the fact that several geographical indications point to the residence of the writer on the west of Jordan. This is incompatible with Moses' authorship, since he died on the eastern side, and was not permitted to cross into the Promised Land. If indications of place are inconsistent with Mosaic authorship, the same may be said with reference to indications of time. Many of these carry us down long past the time of Moses. The period when the Canaanite was in the land is looked back upon as lying in the past. Abraham pursues his foes as far as Dan, though Laish first received this name in the time of the Judges. Canaan is called by Joseph ' the land of the Hebrews.' The phrase ' unto this day,' used with reference to incidents or conditions which originated at the close of the wandering, points to a period long subsequent to Moses. We even read ' while the children of Israel were in the wilderness ' (Num. xv. 32); and we have a list of the kings of Edom who reigned ' before there reigned any king of the children of Israel.' This carries us at least into the time of Saul. Moreover, the author draws upon documents descriptive of the events of the wilderness period, which it is hardly likely Moses would use to write the history of his own leadership of the people. It is certainly most improbable that

for an event which happened a few months only before his death he should have employed such a document."

The cumulative implication of these points is very strong, but even so it is not absolutely conclusive. It makes one thing quite certain, however, viz., that even if Moses were the original author of the books, the form in which they have come down to us is a later revision, with numerous editorial interpolations. This conclusion is inescapable, and can only be ignored by the process of deliberately shutting our eyes to plain facts. Of course many earnest "defenders" of the Bible, in their zeal for the traditional view, do ignore it; but it is a little difficult for ordinary folk to understand how we honour the Bible, or can hope to "defend" it, by shutting our eyes to its own plain facts, and ignoring its own clear testimony. Conservative *scholars* do not, of course, take this attitude. Dr. Orr, for instance, quite frankly states that "the Pentateuch has undergone a good deal of revision, and sometimes this revision has left pretty deep traces upon the text." I will not dwell further on this point, beyond remarking that it is another *proof* that Biblical criticism is no modern invention, for it is clear that the pre-Christian scribes did not hesitate to deal freely and critically with the Sacred Records. Revision *is* criticism.

Two other striking facts that emerge as we study the Pentateuch are, first, that we constantly find parallel narratives—the same story retold with variations. We meet with such a case in the very beginning, where we have the two-fold Creation story. Secondly, that we find in these books, sup-

posedly written before the people became a settled nation in Canaan, the *complete* legal and ritual codes. If Moses wrote them it means that, when the Israelites were rude nomads, and in a comparatively primitive stage of civilisation, culture and religious development, they were provided in advance with the laws and regulations that they would not, and could not, need until hundreds of years later. While they were still primitive wanderers they were given the legislative equipment of a settled people in a much more advanced stage of cultural and religious development. It is as though, in a document which professed to be a schedule of Magna Charta, we found detailed regulations for the control of modern railway transport, or the modern franchise. Of course it is miraculously possible that Moses was so inspired to make this provision for the people in advance, but the miracle is so remarkable that it is little wonder that we ask for more reliable evidence than is provided for us in a mere tradition. Especially so, as a study of the laws themselves reveals many discrepancies, that are only explicable on the assumption that we have in the records different stages of legislation, spread over a very considerable period of national development. I may refer you again to an admission by Dr. Orr, in the book to which you once referred me as being a satisfying answer to the critical case: "It is not necessarily implied in the recognition of a substantially Mosaic origin of the Laws, that Moses wrote all these laws, or any of them with his own pen; or that they were all written down at one time; or that they underwent no subsequent changes in drafting or development; or that the collection of them was

not a more or less gradual process; or that there may not have been smaller collections in circulation and use prior to the final collection and codification as we now have it." Yes, but even if a tithe of these admissions by Dr. Orr is justified, it is proof that the tradition regarding the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is *not true*. At the most we are justified in saying that there is a "Mosaic element" in the books, but that the books themselves, at any rate in the form in which they have come down to us, are the product of other hands, of a time long subsequent to Moses.

Again, if Moses *did* give the laws in the full detail with which we find them in the Pentateuch, we find ourselves faced with another difficulty. We read on in the subsequent history, as it is given to us in Joshua, Judges, Samuel, etc., and we find abundant evidence of a complete ignorance on the part of the people, and also of their religious leaders, concerning a great many of the "Mosaic" laws and religious ordinances. We find the people doing many things that these laws condemned and, on the other hand, not doing many things that the laws enjoined; in neither case, however, with any consciousness of wrongdoing. In short, it is perfectly clear, from the Scriptural records themselves, that if all Israel's laws were "given by Moses," the nation knew nothing of many of them until centuries later. In view of all these facts, is it any wonder that careful students of the books, as distinct from the zealous upholders of certain traditions concerning the books, seriously question the validity of the tradition? Moreover, when we note that the tradition is unsupported by a single fact, while

against it is arrayed a whole bevy of facts, can we question that, in spite of its venerable history and associations, it has no claim to our allegiance if we are to have regard to the far more important interests of truth ?

Let me say, however, that I am not unmindful of an objection that you will almost certainly raise. You will point out, with perfect justice, that the tradition was accepted, apparently without question, by our Lord, and His Apostles, and you may argue that that surely is a *fact* which for the Christian is final and authoritative, and which cannot be outweighed by any amount of testimony that may seem to conflict with it. From the Christian point of view that is, of course, a very strong argument. I do not wish to shirk it, but I shall be glad if you will allow me to postpone consideration of it for the moment. I will deal with it, and certain other cognate matters, when next I write. But before finishing this letter, I should like to say something on another possible objection that may occur to you. You may well ask how it is, if the Mosaic tradition is so unsubstantiated, that it has held the field for so long. If the facts are as I have stated, surely it is passing strange that it should have been left to a few scholars of our own day to discover them. I state that quite reasonable objection, and will gladly deal with it, because in so doing I shall, I think, be able to prove to you that the so-called modern criticism is not nearly so modern as you and your friends sometimes imagine.

In 1670 the famous philosopher, Spinoza, who was a Dutch Jew, published his *Theological and Political Tract.* Dr. A. Duff, in his *History of Old*

Testament Criticism, speaks of this work as justifying us in calling Spinoza the great father of all modern Old Testament criticism. In the tract one chapter is headed: "Herein is shewn that the Pentateuch, the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, were not written by any of the men described in them." Moreover, in the chapter the author quotes at length from one of the most famous Rabbis of the Middle Ages (Rabbi Aben Ezra, of about A.D. 1100) who makes it clear that he—an orthodox Jewish teacher—did not believe that Moses wrote the books so often attributed to him. This fact is surely sufficient evidence that the Mosaic tradition has not been so unchallenged until our own time as we have been apt to believe. Again, Hobbes, the English philosopher (1588-1679), said in his famous book, *Leviathan*, that a Mosaic authorship for the Pentateuch was not at all indispensable.

The modern critical *method*, however, is usually dated from the publication, in 1753, by a French physician, Dr. Astruc, of a book called *Conjectures on Genesis*. In this work he set forth for the first time the theory which has since won practically universal acceptance. It is called the documentary theory. From the repetitions, the parallel narratives, the different uses of the Divine names, etc., he was led to the conclusion that the Book of Genesis is a compilation from, or a blending together of, a number of earlier documents. He conjectured two chief sources, and others of secondary importance. This conjecture does not necessarily rule Moses out. As a matter of fact, Astruc himself believed that it was Moses who had made use of the various sources in the compilation of the book.

But it was soon seen by those who followed up the suggestive line that Astruc had opened out, and who went on quite naturally to apply it to the other Pentateuchal books, that this hypothesis would not hold good, for some of the sources were certainly post-Mosaic in origin. Astruc's main suggestion has, however, stood the test of the most searching examination, and it is the simple truth to say that all subsequent study of the Pentateuch has gone to confirm his documentary theory. There is no need for me to attempt here a detailed exposition of the theory: there is a multitude of books on the subject which will do that for you. But the sum of it is that, although there have been, and still are, many differences of opinion among scholars as to the actual details of the process, there is practical unanimity on the main points, viz., that there are distinct and clearly marked strata in the Pentateuch, consisting chiefly of three narrative documents and two main legal codes, and the final compilation was not, and could not have been, made until nearly a thousand years after Moses' day. As the modern movement dates in this way from 1753, since which time it has gone on with ever-increasing strength, and has attracted to its service an ever-increasing number of the world's greatest Biblical and linguistic scholars, you will see that my statement about its having gone on for nearly two hundred years is not the exaggeration that you thought. Also its main results are so assured that for a generation past they have been accepted as axiomatic in the vast majority of the schools of Biblical learning; and, so far from their having undermined the Christian Faith, they are accepted

by an ever-increasing number of Evangelical Christians who have found that, when rightly understood, those results immeasurably enrich their Biblical knowledge, and establish their faith in the Bible on a surer foundation. And surely there is nothing very remarkable in this. For what *can* be the practical outcome of this newer view-point? Certainly it cannot lessen the interest of those ancient books. That depends on their subject matter, not on their reputed authorship. It is the same with their moral and spiritual teaching. To take but one example out of a multitude, will the beautiful story of Isaac and Rebekah lose any of its charm if it is proved that the book in which we find the story was not written by Moses? Would *Paradise Lost* be any the less a noble poem if it should happen to be proved that another than Milton wrote it? Whatever may be the final outcome of the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy, will it affect the dramatic power and genius of *Hamlet*? Someone has wisely said that if it should turn out that a great painting which had been attributed to Raphael was not his work, but the work of an otherwise unknown artist, there would not be one great picture the less, but one great artist the more. We may argue about questions of Pentateuchal authorship, and may be very "disturbed" when our traditional ideas and conceptions are challenged, but the value of the books for us is, *and always has been*, in their own intrinsic worth. If they have any such worth it cannot be destroyed, but on the contrary can only be enhanced, by a truer knowledge of the facts.

Before I leave this subject I ought, perhaps, to refer to a line of argument which is very popular

with those who attempt to refute the critical hypothesis. I quote a statement of it as it is given in the introduction to a recent little book entitled *The Modernist Bible and how compiled.* "We have in English certain novels by Besant and Rice. Is there any English critic alive who will undertake to mark in blue pencil the passages written by Rice? . . . Yet the Higher Critics make this claim for a literature three thousand years old!—which is absurd, as Euclid says." But this is *not* what the critics claim to do. There is surely a vast difference between the work of joint contemporaneous authorship and that of editorial compilation from earlier documents. Two present-day historians might collaborate in the writing of an account of the battle of Waterloo, and it might well be impossible for the most acute literary critic to differentiate their respective contributions. But if another writer compiled a record in which he incorporated and wove together extracts from, say, the Duke of Wellington's dispatches, the *Times* report, Victor Hugo's account of the battle in *Les Misérables*, and the later memoirs and correspondence of some of those who took part, it would be by no means impossible for a critic to trace out the different sources. This method of editorial compilation is not, of course, the one followed by modern historians, but there is clear and irrefutable evidence that something like it was the method followed by the unknown editors who were responsible for the final form of many of the historical books of the Old Testament.

The writer of the introduction from which I have quoted is a Doctor of Science, and a distinguished

man in his own sphere. But when he goes on to assert that "not a single scientific worker favours the Higher Criticism," one can only reply bluntly that the statement is altogether untrue. But even if it were not, it would have little value. Eminence in any particular branch or branches of physical science no more qualifies a man to dogmatise on technical points of literary and historical criticism than eminence in the latter justifies dogmatism in the concerns of the former. The shoemaker does well to stick to his last. You do not call in a Doctor of Music when you are down with the flu, nor do you consult your medical man when you want an expert opinion on Beethoven's Sonatas. Every branch of knowledge has its own specialised standards and methods. The technical points of literary and historical criticism can only be dealt with by the specialised methods peculiar to that study, and they are not the methods of the chemist, or the geologist, or the astronomer. This does not mean that the expert in any specialised sphere is infallible, and that his word must always be accepted without question. But it does mean that his work can only be tested by the standards and methods which are applicable to his particular study. Biblical critics may often make mistakes, and draw faulty deductions, but when they do, their errors can only be rectified by more careful criticism.

XVI

THE VERDICT OF JESUS

I WANT in this letter to deal with the very important subject to which I made brief reference when last I wrote. The issue may be summarised in a question: What is the verdict of Jesus Christ on the whole matter of Biblical criticism and its results? From the fundamentalist point of view this is, of course, the crux of the whole matter, and I want to make it clear that I, for one, have no quarrel with the devotion which is jealous for the honour of our Lord, and which demands that uncompromising resistance be offered to any teaching which fails to recognise His unique and absolute authority. If those who advocate the modern view of the Bible are open to that charge, it is a very serious matter indeed. I can assure you that I shall discuss the question with a due sense of its gravity.

Well, then, we can begin on a point of agreement. We are at one in our glad and grateful recognition that "Jesus Christ is Lord." Hence we shall not need to discuss the reality of His authority for us. If Jesus has given an authoritative and decisive word on the particular issue with which we are concerned, our Christian duty is clear. Acknowledging His authority, we shall loyally submit to it.

The fundamentalist argument is that we have such an authoritative word. Jesus accepted the Old Testament as of Divine origin and authority. He appealed to it in support of His own claims—it "testified" of Him. He quoted from "Moses" and "David" and "Jonah," and others, and gave no hint that there was anything doubtful or unreliable about the traditional interpretations of the writings from which He quoted. True, He did not make any definite pronouncements on questions of authorship or date, but His tacit acceptance of the current ideas was surely equivalent to such a pronouncement, for it is inconceivable that He would have remained silent if He had known those ideas to be wrong. If, on the other hand, they were wrong, and He did *not* know it, the whole question of His Divinity is challenged. For how could He have been "God manifest in the flesh," as Christian faith has always rejoiced to believe, if His knowledge on these matters was limited by the conditions of His own day, and hence not free from error? That briefly, I think, is how the matter appeals to you and your friends.

Before I begin to discuss the issue that is raised, I should like to deal with a preliminary point upon which you may quite fairly challenge me. You may ask how, on the modernist view of the Bible, we can have any certainty as to what Jesus actually did say. If the Bible is inerrant, we can appeal with confidence to its every word. But if the reporters of Jesus were not miraculously shielded from all possibility of error, and their records were not necessarily word perfect, where

do we stand? Is it of any use our discussing what Jesus is reported to have said, if we have no guarantee of the accuracy of the reports? Well, I think that the only honest answer is that we have no absolute guarantee at all. We must admit that we cannot possibly be certain that Jesus was never misunderstood or misreported. The records were written by men, and they are therefore subject to the inevitable human limitations of the writers. That is sufficiently demonstrated by the fact that it is quite impossible to harmonise the records in every detail. But this does not mean that we are left in the mists of hopeless uncertainty, with no secure foothold. As a matter of fact our foothold is very firm indeed. For one thing, the integrity and worth of the Gospels as historical documents, quite apart from their religious significance, has been amply demonstrated. They have, of course, been submitted to the most drastic scrutiny, and the most strenuous efforts have been made to prove their unreliability. But they have come through the ordeal with great credit. I cannot now discuss the question in detail, but this can be said with confidence: that judged by the ordinary standards of historical interpretation the New Testament records stand very high indeed among ancient historical documents. Sir W. M. Ramsay, one of our greatest authorities on the subject, tells us that when he began his researches into the history of the Church of the First Century he had little confidence in the reliability of the New Testament historians, but before he had gone very far in his studies he was led to the conviction that Luke, with whose

writings he was especially concerned, was one of the "great" historians of the ancient world, and that his writings, while not showing complete freedom from all error, have that trustworthiness which is "the first and the essential quality of the great historian." Ramsay is referring particularly to the Acts of the Apostles, but if Luke showed the trustworthiness of the great historian when writing about Paul, he was hardly likely to be deficient in that virtue when his subject was Jesus. It is true that there was an interval of more than thirty years between the end of the earthly ministry of Jesus and the writing of our first Gospel, but that interval was not a blank, nor was it filled only with vague and indefinite oral teaching. It is practically certain that the writers of our Gospels made use of earlier documents, and in any case we know that the Apostolic teaching concerning Jesus was of a very definite and clear-cut kind. Later generations supplemented the Gospels with fanciful fictions, but there is not the slightest ground for suggesting that the Gospels themselves are the product of fictitious fancy. It has become increasingly possible to test their historic, geographic and other references, and the result has been a noteworthy vindication of their integrity.

But there is something even more important than this external verification. The supreme wonder of the fourfold portrait of Jesus is its self-consistency. The Gospels introduce us to a real person. And it is clear that He made so deep and vivid an impression on the hearts and minds of those who came into intimate contact with Him that they simply could not go far wrong in their

later testimony concerning Him. There are many differences of detail in the records, as we should expect, and the Fourth Gospel has certain features which clearly differentiate it from the other three, and which provide one of the chief problems of New Testament criticism. But the Gospel portrait of Jesus is a distinct and self-consistent unity. We have no difficulty at all about most of the recorded words of Jesus, because they are so congruous with His personality. The words and the life harmonise, and they are both too wonderful and unique to be other than true. It is utterly inconceivable that either the portrait or the teaching could have been the imaginative invention of the Gospel writers. Hence, while making no assertion of miraculous inerrancy, and with frank acknowledgment that there are real difficulties and problems on points of detail, there is a confident assurance about our knowledge of the "Jesus of History," and that is the secret of the wonderful records of "Jesus in the experience of men."

There is nothing very startling, or even particularly modern, about this line of interpretation. For example, not even the most rigid believer in verbal inspiration interprets at its face value such a recorded word of Jesus as, "He that hateth not his father and mother." He interprets it in the light of his knowledge of Jesus Himself. In a word, the subjective element enters, and is more important than the objective, even though it may not be acknowledged.

Assuming, then, the general reliability of the records concerning the words of Jesus, how are we

to interpret those statements in which He tacitly accepted the current ideas concerning the ancient Scriptures, or those more positive statements concerning their Divine authority, such as, "One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled"? To take the latter first, we must not forget that it is recorded in the same discourse that Jesus quoted certain statements from the Law, and said of them, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you." As a matter of fact these apparently inconsistent statements are found in the same paragraph, and are intimately associated. Jesus asserted the importance and value of the old, and warned against any disregard of its authority, but at the same time declared that the old was "fulfilled" by being merged into something larger and more perfect. The old was to be realised, not violated, as Dr. Gore puts it. The main emphasis of the passage is not so much upon the authority of the old Law, as on the authority of Jesus Himself in giving the new Law. It makes clear our Lord's lofty valuation of the old, and is a warning against that somewhat shallow disparagement of it to which we are sometimes prone, but at the same time the passage, and similar ones, cannot legitimately be taken to foreclose any discussion as to when, or how, or by whom the old Law was promulgated, or how the books recording it came into being.

You may reply that the question is settled by the fact that Jesus often quoted the Law as "Moses," and that this decides for us the whole matter of authorship. But does it? Does it

prove anything more than that the Mosaic tradition held the field at the time? And, granting that Jesus apparently did not question the reliability of the tradition, are we precluded from examining it, and discarding it if we find that it is untenable? To put the question in another form, is it disloyalty to Jesus, or any disparagement of His divine claims, to suggest that He did accept certain ideas which the larger knowledge of our day has shown to be untrue? Does the recognition of His divinity compel us to postulate His omniscience?

I cannot, of course, in the brief space at my disposal, enter upon a full discussion of the Nature of Christ. But there are a number of points that I should like to suggest for your consideration. First, then, I suggest that we bear in mind an elementary fact, viz., that our court of appeal is the Scriptures, and in this case supremely the Gospels. They are our ultimate source of information concerning Jesus, and, if we would know who and what He was, it is to them that we must turn for our primary information. That is obvious, but I stress it because many things have been, and are, said about Jesus that are not the product of New Testament exposition, but of devout imagination!

In the early days of the Church this imaginative tendency was allowed full play, and it produced some noteworthy results. One was the *Gospels of the Infancy*, in which the story of the "hidden years" was told with every kind of fanciful embellishment. The Child Jesus was portrayed as a wonder-worker from the beginning, performing

miracles when at play with His little companions, and in the home and workshop. The stories were, of course, pure fiction, but they were very popular. Christian devotion loved to think that Jesus *must* have been such a Wonder Child.

Jeremy Taylor, the great seventeenth-century divine, and author of the first modern *Life of Christ*, wrote thus of the incident of the Boy Jesus in the Temple: "He was discoursing up to the height of a prophet, with the clearness of an angel, and the infallibility of inspiration." It is very devout, but it has not the slightest congruity with Luke's story of the Boy "asking questions."

And the same tendency is manifest in a good deal of the devotional, and often in the more formal theological and expository literature of the Church. It has, of course, an altogether admirable motive. It is an expression of love and devotion. The Church's ever-deepening experience of the wondrous grace of her Lord, and her ever-deepening conception of His divine glory, have led her to feel that she cannot say too much about Him, or make too great claims on His behalf. Can love ever say too much? Yes, it can, if it says what is not true. And it is quite certain that in her love for her Lord the Church has said some things about Him that are not true, and which cannot be reconciled with His own self-testimony, or with the Gospel records concerning Him.

One of the greatest tasks of the Early Church was to expound and safeguard the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. That was rightly regarded as a fundamental of supreme importance. The great

historic Creeds are a witness to the Church's thought and labour on that great theme. But with full recognition of their value, and of the service they have rendered to the Christian cause throughout the centuries, it is open to us to point out that there has been a tendency to a one-sided emphasis. Jesus Christ was the God-Man, and hence the full-orbed truth involves the Deity *and* the Humanity. It is easily understandable—it was, in fact, inevitable—that the emphasis should fall primarily upon the former. But in stressing the fact that the glory of the Incarnation was that a Man was *God*, we must not fail to stress that there was an equal glory in the fact that a *Man* was God. The Church has never forgotten that, and any attempt to deny the reality of the Manhood has rightly been resisted as heretical, but at the same time any attempt to stress the Manhood has usually been regarded with suspicion and disfavour. The Church has always been far more eager to claim for Jesus the full attributes of Deity than to acknowledge that He possessed the *full* attributes of Humanity, and to follow that out to its full implications. The Church has feared to say too much about the Humanity of Christ lest that should seem to involve a dimming of the glory of His Divinity.

The Gospel records, however, show us that Jesus was a *Man*, not in any seeming sense, nor in the sense that a human body was a temporary vehicle of Divine activity, the Divine Spirit dwelling in the human body, but altogether transcending all its human characteristics and limitations. No, Jesus *was* a Man, living a human life as really as

we live it, growing up as we do, gathering knowledge by the ordinary methods of human learning, passing through the same experiences of temptation and trial, and facing up to the same problems that are our common human heritage. *How* all this could be if Jesus were the Son of God, the Eternal Word who was in the beginning with God, and who was God, remains, and ever will remain, a mystery that baffles our understanding. Even Paul did not, and could not, fully explain it in his doctrine of the self-emptying of the pre-existent Son. But that it *was* so is clear on every page of the Gospels. Jesus was "tempted (literally, tried) in all points like as we are." But the trials of life for us are mostly due to our limitations. If we knew everything, if we could understand everything, if we could pierce the veil that the future hangs before us, life would be altogether different from what it is; its problems would cease to baffle us, and its burdens to oppress us. How then could Jesus have been tried in all points like as we are if He were free from all the limitations that are the very source of our trials? To say this is not to ignore the great declaration of John, "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Rather is it to recognise that one of the most wonderful ways in which that glory and grace were revealed was in the gracious condescension whereby "He humbled Himself" to the voluntary acceptance of those limitations, and to being "like unto His brethren." The glory was in the graciousness.

In studying the Gospel records there is no need

for us to put undue stress, as is sometimes done, on the passage in which Jesus definitely says that He is ignorant concerning "that day." That passage does not stand alone; it is in keeping with the whole story. We are told that the Boy Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature." In other words, He did not begin with complete knowledge and understanding. He learnt as other boys did, from His parents, the village school, and the synagogue. When, then, did He reach the point of perfection? At His baptism, it is often said: the descent of the Spirit meant His complete endowment with wisdom and knowledge. But the Gospels do not say so, or even imply it, and that interpretation is one that must be read into the story, for it is certainly not found there. Again, we find Jesus frequently asking questions that seek for information. If He knew everything, such questions were not only unnecessary, they were deceptive, for they certainly gave others the impression that they were genuine, and they were responded to on that understanding. Again, there is not the slightest hint that in the realm of what we call secular knowledge—literary, historical, scientific—Jesus claimed any understanding beyond that of His contemporaries, or what He would learn through the ordinary channels of education that were open to Him. Nor, I think, has it ever bee claimed for Him that He made any contribution to the world's store of knowledge in such realms. He had a marvellous insight into human nature. As John puts it, "He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man." And in the realm of

moral and spiritual truth He was supreme. He "spoke with authority." Through the moral and spiritual teaching of Jesus, and, even more, through His life and death and resurrection, which so wonderfully illuminated the teaching, and which were themselves so essential a part of the message, God gave His supreme revelation to the world.

Jesus came "in the fulness of the times," but His coming was at a particular time. Every "time" has its own mental framework, with its own circle of ideas, and imperfect standards of knowledge. The Divine Christ is the Light of the ages, but the human Jesus, in all that pertained to His humanity, and its equipment of human knowledge, was a child of his age. Hence when we find that Jesus quoted from the Pentateuch as "Moses," it simply gives us an additional proof that the Mosaic tradition held the field at that time. We have no warrant for taking it as proof that the tradition was true. Jesus spoke in the common terms, and in accord with the current ideas. Nor is any other situation conceivable. Had He not done so He would have been unintelligible to His hearers, and His reporters would indeed have needed a miraculous endowment to enable them to record His teaching. Certainly it would never have been written that "the common people heard Him gladly." Moreover, it is difficult to see what positive advantage would have accrued if Jesus had dealt with problems which could only emerge on the intellectual battleground of a much more advanced state of knowledge than that of His own day. In any case they were not the matters with which He was concerned. The

timelessness which is so marked a characteristic of His teaching, even though it was given at, and in the terms of a particular time, is due to the fact that He was concerned with the spirit and message of the Scriptures, and not with their literary structure. In a word, the "critical" questions which are inevitable for us simply did not exist for Him, and we shall look in vain for any decisive, or even guiding word from Him upon them.

Another interesting passage in which Jesus refers to the Old Testament is that in which He speaks of the sign of the prophet Jonah. This is often taken as guaranteeing the historicity of that much discussed book—though the discussions are usually about one comparatively minor incident in the book. So much zeal has been expended in arguing as to whether Jonah were literally swallowed by a great fish, that the sublime missionary message of the book has been sadly overlooked. But does the use that Jesus makes of the story prove its literal historicity? Quite apart from the fact that Luke records the "sign" as being in the *preaching* of Jonah, which is far more in harmony with the whole discourse of our Lord, and suggests that the verse in Matthew about the fish is a later interpolation, and also the fact that Jesus is definitely protesting against the desire for any external sign such as the deliverance of Jonah would have been—how would He have quoted from the familiar story if it were not literal history, but a religious allegory? Surely in precisely the way in which He did quote from it. In other words, the use that Jesus made of the story gives us no hint either way as to whether it is history or fiction, and it certainly does not

foreclose the question. Let me draw a simple illustration from your own letters. In one of them recently you said that we modernists, in spite of our boasted up-to-dateness, are asleep like Rip Van Winkle, while in another you said that I was putting the telescope to my blind eye, like Lord Nelson. One of these references was to a fictitious, the other to an historical character, but you did not differentiate between them on that account. Nor was there any need that you should. You simply followed the method of ordinary common sense, and assumed that I would do the same. Is it irreverent to bring the same practical faculty to bear in our reading of the Scriptures?

Moreover, did not Jesus Himself constantly make use of the medium of fiction to express the highest truth? He "made up stories" to convey His message. If you say that His use of the story of Jonah proves that it was literally true, why do you speak of the *parable* of the Good Samaritan, or of the Prodigal Son? They are not so described in the Gospels, except in the comparatively modern chapter headings of our versions. Jesus simply told the stories, with no hint that He was not describing actual occurrences. But the fact that we describe them as parables is sufficient proof that it is not necessary for us to read every Bible story as history unless it bears a distinct label proclaiming its non-literal nature. Why should not Jonah be read as an Old Testament parable? If we do so read it, we reap the double advantage of concentrating on its *message*, and also avoiding the profitless controversies which are inevitable if we read it as history. And the Book of Jonah does not stand alone in this

respect. In every ancient literature folk-lore and sagas precede the more formal historical writings. Why should we imagine that the Hebrew literature was an exception? If we found a book like, say, Job among ancient Greek writings, we should at once recognise it to be a great drama, and we should interpret it as we do the dramas of Æschylus or Sophocles. Why should we imagine that because it is found in the sacred literature of the Hebrews it is irreverent not to treat it as sober history?

To sum up: our Lord's treatment of the Old Testament is instructive for us all. It reminds the critical modernist that the Old Testament, with all its imperfections and incompleteness, was our Lord's Bible. He loved and revered it, and nourished His soul upon its teaching. That in itself is enough to condemn the irreverent handling to which the Book has sometimes been submitted. On the other hand it makes clear that the most devout and enthusiastic Bible lover is not justified in seeking to prevent honest and reverent inquiry into problems which did not exist in our Lord's day, and upon which He did not, and could not, make any pronouncement, but which are so real to us that we cannot ignore them unless we are prepared to dissociate piety from intellectual integrity. Jesus said "I am the Truth," and we do not honour Him if we endeavour, even in the name of devotion, to hinder the work of truth seekers.

XVII

THE FUNDAMENTALIST CRITIC

I COME now to the last of the points you raised in your recent letter. You say that the modern attitude to the Bible, with its denial that the whole Book, from cover to cover, is literally the Word of God, leads inevitably to the exaltation of the human intellect, and to the claim of that intellect to pick and choose, to accept or reject as it pleases. The true Christian attitude should be one of reverent submission and humble-mindedness, with a willingness to learn of, and to be judged by, the Bible. To claim, on the contrary, that we have the right to judge the Bible, and to please ourselves as to what parts of it we shall acknowledge, and what parts we shall ignore, is utterly unchristian, if not positively blasphemous. And that is the claim that the modernist makes, in effect, if not in so many words. You give as an illustration the recent issue of a *Shorter Bible for Schools*, and you ask what is likely to be the effect on the minds of young people if they are led to understand that the Divine Book may be abbreviated at the whim of scholars. How can they have the same respect for the Book as *Divine* if it is treated in that way ?

I frankly admit that your objection is a serious one, and I know that it expresses the concern that is sincerely felt by many earnest Christians and

Bible lovers. But I venture to suggest, and I think I can prove, that it is not really so serious as at first sight it appears to be. For instance, it appears to be a grave charge when you say that the modernist claims the right to "pick and choose." But do not even the fundamentalists the same? Of course they do—naturally, inevitably, and without any question. It is simply another case of theory being altogether out of harmony with practice. Take your own case, and put yourself under examination—"prove your own self," as Paul says. You are a fervid "cover to cover" enthusiast. Your theory (and you hold it so strongly that you call it a conviction, and not a theory) is that every word of your Bible is of Divine authorship and authority, "the direct utterance of the Most High," as Dr. Burgon put it. Hence you pay tribute and honour to the whole Book, and you are indignant if anyone else says anything that seems to question the value or validity of any part of it. But how does your practice tally with your theory? You may possibly be consistent so far, in that you read the Bible through from cover to cover, making that one of your definite spiritual exercises or disciplines. But such steady ploughing through the Book from beginning to end would not be your only, or chief, method of Bible study. If it were, it would simply prove that you never *studied* the Bible at all, but that you used the Book as a sort of fetish, and believed that there was some magical efficacy and virtue in the mere steady reading of it. No, you *study* your Bible in quite a different way. You compare passage with passage, you trace out references and cross references, you deal with topics, you work out the Scriptural teaching on particular

subjects. In short, the mere steady reading through the Bible from beginning to end may be useful in familiarising you with the letter, and in giving you a bird's-eye view of the whole, but your real study of the Bible has for its object the understanding of the spirit and message of the Book. And in such study you follow a selective process, whether you realise and acknowledge it or not. Even in the steady reading of the Book from cover to cover, you do the same to a certain extent. Are there not many chapters that you read simply because they are there in the course that you are steadily following, and which have nothing in them that particularly appeals to you or interests you, while there are other chapters that you fondly linger over? If you follow the method of reading through the Bible in your daily devotional exercises, taking a chapter a day as your "Scripture portion," can you honestly say that you *always* get devotional and spiritual help out of your chapter? Are there not many chapters where you have to read a spiritually helpful message *into* them, if you are to find it at all? Or, if you say that you can always find *something* suggestive and helpful, even in the most arid regions of chronological details, or ritual and legal enactments, you certainly would not suggest that all chapters are of *equal* interest and value. Even in such definitely devotional portions as the Psalms, the same truth holds good. Some of those old Jewish hymns have so stolen into your heart that you know them *by* heart; while others hardly grip you at all. Some you read with delight; others you read simply because they happen to be there. In other words, even in your more formal reading of Scripture your heart uncon-

sciously follows a selective process, even though your head may regard the very suggestion as impious.

When it comes to your real Bible study, as distinct from your more formal Bible reading, the fact is so manifest that there should really be no need to point it out. You " pick and choose," although you would shrink from expressing the fact in such blunt terms. You pay verbal tribute to the equal divine authority of everything in the Bible, but you most certainly do not treat everything as of equal authority, and of equal claim on your allegiance. You " pick and choose " among the laws of the Old Testament, which you assert are the laws of God. Some of them are, of course, of local and temporary reference, and hence obviously have no claim to our obedience. But many of them are definite moral and legal pronouncements, with no implication that they were intended only for the Old Dispensation. Some you acknowledge and accept; others you do not. You accept the Ten Commandments, but you do not hesitate to modify them to suit your own requirements. You certainly do not *keep* the Commandment concerning the Sabbath Day. If they are all of equal divine authority, what right have you to " pick and choose " as you do? Dr. Nixon, in his charming little book *Understanding the Bible*, points out that in Deuteronomy we find the injunction, " Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together "; while another verse in the same book reads, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might "; and he justly comments that it is a *reductio ad absurdum* to maintain the equal authority of those two state-

ments. You label them in bulk as equally divine and authoritative, but actually you recognise their inequality as clearly as does the most drastic modern critic. I could go on to fill pages with similar illustrations, all proving that your practice does not in the least tally with your precept. Glance through your own Bible, in which I know you make use of the method of Bible marking. Is it not the fact that some pages are covered with marks and notes and comments, while other pages are almost free from them? Do you dig the same gold out of Numbers, or Judges, or Esther as you mine from Isaiah, or the Gospels, or the Epistles of Paul? Of course you do not, nor do you expect to. You follow a selective process that is guided by your Christian instinct. Some parts of the Bible are obviously more *Christian* than other parts, and it is that fact that determines your choice. And, as Christians, we are quite right in obeying our Christian instincts, even when they lead us to reject or ignore some of the statements and teachings of the Bible itself. As Christians our loyalty is due to Jesus Christ far more than to the Bible. We owe loyalty to the Bible only in so far as it is loyal to Him. The Bible is a book of revelation, but its supreme revelation is Jesus Christ Himself, and all else must be tested by reference to Him. The Bible gives us knowledge of Christ, and our knowledge of Christ provides us with the standard by which we judge everything else in the Bible.

The principle applies "from cover to cover," for when I say that some parts of the Bible are obviously more *Christian* than others, I do not have in mind simply the distinction between the

Old and the New Testaments. There is a great deal in the Old Testament that is Christian in spirit, a true fore-shadowing of the fuller revelation that was to be given in Him, and in harmony with that fuller revelation. On the other hand, there is much that is *not* in harmony. With full recognition of its wonder and sublimity as a record of Divine revelation, we cannot shut our eyes to the fact that the note of the Old Testament is that of imperfection and incompleteness. If it were not, there would have been no need for the fuller and more perfect revelation in Christ Himself. God had "at sundry times and in divers manners spoken in time past unto the fathers by the prophets"; He had given revelation of His character and purposes and will. But man did not fully and truly know Him. Many ideas concerning the Divine character were cherished, even by devout souls, that cannot be held by anyone who has "seen the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Many things were, in all sincerity and devotion, attributed to the Divine activity that cannot possibly be reconciled with the Divine purposes as Jesus Christ has revealed them. Many human actions and declarations were justified as being in accord with the Divine will and command, but they were utterly un-Christlike. If Jesus were God manifest in the flesh, the Son in whom in these last days God has spoken unto us, then it means, not only that Jesus is like God, but also that God is like Jesus. If we would know the heart and mind and purpose and character of God we must read them in Jesus. And surely that great truth sheds its radiance over the past as

well as over the present and the future. It means that God was like Jesus even in those primitive barbaric days when men *thought* He was a warlike and revengeful deity, commanding the wholesale slaughter of His foes, and delighting in their destruction. You claim that the 137th Psalm is a Word of God, with its "O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." Doubtless the writer quite sincerely thought that he was expressing a sentiment that was in harmony with the will and purpose of Jehovah, but we know quite well that he was wrong. We know that, because we know Jesus Christ, who said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you"; and again, "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Has God changed? Was His attitude to mankind different before Jesus came from what it has been since? Is it only since Jesus came that it has been true of the little children that "their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven"? Can we, as Christians, really believe that the Great All Father at one time smiled with approval on the proposal to avenge the sufferings of the children of the Israelites by dashing on the stones the little ones of Babylon? Can we imagine that psalm on the lips of Jesus? No, God has not changed. Moses and Samuel and David did not say, as John did, "God is love," or "God so loved the world," but that is not

because God had changed in John's day from what He had been in the days of those earlier religious leaders. What *had* changed was man's understanding of the true nature of God. God loved the little ones of Babylon, because His very nature was love, but not even the most devout and God-fearing Jew realised it. It needed the coming of Jesus to teach men the great truth. But now that it has been taught us, we must judge everything in its light. We are Christians, and one result of that, if we are going to be worthy of the name, is that we must take Jesus Christ as our standard and norm in Biblical interpretation. Everything in the Old Testament has a *historic* interest for us, as showing us the steps by which man has slowly advanced in spiritual knowledge and understanding, but nothing in the Old Testament has any binding authority for us if it be not in harmony with the revelation of God in Christ. Jesus Himself applied the principle. Speaking to men who believed that the Scriptures were the infallible and changeless Word of God, He said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . but I say unto you. . . ." That is *our* standard and test. What *He* says unto us is all-important, and of binding authority.

Look back over the records of Christian history. What are its darkest pages? Those that tell the story of men who bore the Christian name, but who had not learnt this elementary Christian lesson. Think of the bloodshed that has been "justified" by reference to Old Testament commands regarding the slaughter of the Amalekites, and similar passages. Think of the horrors of

witch-burning, again "justified" by the Old Testament word, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."[1] Nothing has so retarded the progress of the Christian cause as the unwillingness of Christians to *be* Christians, and to rejoice in their Christian freedom from bondage to lower, pre-Christian ideals and conceptions. The Christian Church has been afraid to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free. She has had around her neck the millstone of pre-Christian and un-Christian ideas. She has tried to carry over into the Christian life and experience a great many things that were only part of the preparation for the Christian experience. She has lowered the Christian standards by seeking to incorporate them with many of the imperfect standards of pre-Christian times, and she has spent a great deal of time and devotion in attempting to harmonise things that cannot be harmonised. And it has all been due to the very thing for which you and your friends are fighting so strenuously. If the thought of the Christian Church had not been dominated by a false idea of what the "Word of God" means, she would have been saved from the tragic blunders into which she has fallen, and the pages of Christian history would not have been besmirched by the record of so many things that fill us with shame. The Church's business is, above all else, to be Christian. Her loyalty is to Jesus Christ, and to Him alone. She possesses as one of her priceless heritages, the Scriptures of

[1] Think how, even in the middle of the nineteenth century, slavery was "justified" by appealing to early Old Testament records.

the Jewish Church, as well as her own *Christian* Writings. In those older records there is a great deal of abiding value both for Christian instruction and Christian devotion, especially in the writings of the prophets and psalmists. But to place the Old on the same level as the New, and to regard the whole as of binding authority because it is all the very Word of God, is to miss the mark and to place a burden on our shoulders that God never intended us to carry. Further, it is not fair to God. Forgive my putting it so crudely, but the facts justify me. God has given us His supreme revelation *in Christ*. Why are we so unwilling to accept all the glorious and far-reaching implications of that great truth? We do *not* accept them when we persist in thinking so many things about God that we do not, and cannot, think about Jesus. Even devout Christian thought about God is often coloured, and sometimes dominated, by the cruder Old Testament conceptions of the Divine nature. Think of the unutterable pathos of the cry of the little boy, Waldo, in Olive Schreiner's story, "I love Jesus Christ, but I hate God." And the boy was only putting into words what multitudes have thought, even though they have not dared to express it. They have loved Jesus Christ, but they have hated, or at least been afraid of God. We are not fair to God when we interpret His Book in such a way that it is possible for any one of His creatures so to misunderstand Him. God is love; God is like Jesus; God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself; herein is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us, and sent His Son to

be the propitiation for our sins. *That* is the message of the Bible, and if to accept in the Bible only what harmonises with that supreme message, and to leave aside all that does not so harmonise, is to " pick and choose," then gladly and gratefully do I plead guilty to the charge. *And so do you*, when you follow the dictates of your Christian heart, rather than the reasonings of your Bibliolatrous mind.

I have said nothing about the Shorter Bible to which you referred, though what I have said deals indirectly with that subject. I would only suggest to you that here again you should judge the matter in the light of your practice rather than of your precept. As a matter of actual practice, do you not favour what is in effect a Shorter Bible for young people ? Would you really be gratified to find your boys and girls poring over some of the unsavoury chapters of the Old Testament ? Of course you would not. Therefore as a wise Christian instructor, you pass over such chapters in your Bible teaching to young people. In other words, you make your own Shorter Bible.

XVIII

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

You switch me off in a new direction when you challenge me on the subject of the Bible and Modern Science. Candidly, I do not feel in the least qualified to deal with the matter. I have no scientific bent, nor have I had anything more than the most elementary training in scientific subjects. My very deficiencies, however, do in a way qualify me to deal with the matter from a particular point of view. I can, at any rate, say something about the way in which it appeals to a modern non-scientific Bible student.

Well, then, you want to know why we moderns make such a base surrender to a godless Evolutionism, and are willing to accept anything that the scientist cares to say, even though it be in flat contradiction to the Word. Science, you add, must be judged by the Bible, not the Bible by Science.

The way in which you put your challenge makes it clear that you are misinterpreting the whole situation, and that you have not carefully considered all the implications of your statement. The question whether modern Science is "godless" I will return to in a moment, after I have dealt with one or two other points. First let me say, quite definitely and unequivocally, that

I accept the Bible Science. I accept it as the Science of Bible times. Nor can I see that anything else is demanded of me, either by common sense or by Christian loyalty. If I want to know anything about the scientific ideas and conceptions of the primitive times that are covered by the records of Biblical history, I find a great deal of interesting information on the subject in the Bible. If, however, I want to know anything about Science itself, I go to the writings of present-day scientific experts. And do not even the fundamentalists the same? Of course they do. In other words, your theoretical arguments won't stand a practical test for a single moment. Let me put it quite bluntly, though not, I hope, offensively. You may argue for the inerrancy of Bible Science, but when it comes to a practical issue, you give your vote unhesitatingly to Modern Science every time. And you are not in the least deterred from so doing, even if there is a flat contradiction between the two. Science, of course, has two aspects—the theoretical and the practical. On the theoretical side Science seeks to understand and to explain the facts and laws of the material universe. Then it applies its knowledge in the practical realm. As the theoretical knowledge increases so do the usefulness and value of its practical issues. You have only to give a moment's thought to the matter to realise how wonderful and multitudinous are the blessings and advantages we enjoy in modern life through the triumphs of modern scientific achievement. Moreover, you would find it difficult to name any of those blessings and advantages that you and your

fundamentalist friends are deterred from using because of any theoretical arguments about the contradictions between Science and the Bible. When it comes to a practical issue, as it does a thousand times a day, you are as "modern" as you can possibly be. Take a case in point. If your boy were unfortunate enough to be afflicted with epilepsy, you would give short shrift to any doctor who diagnosed the case on Bible Science lines, and assured you that it was a case of being "possessed with a devil." You would seek to avail yourself of the best modern medical knowledge and skill, and although theoretically you may be as anti-evolutionist as the most uncompromising stalwart in Tennessee, when it came to the practical issue you would eagerly and unhesitatingly trust yourself to experts whose knowledge and skill are the product of evolutionary science. In a word, it comes to this: in all *practical* scientific issues you never think of looking to the Bible as your authority, for you recognise, whether you acknowledge it or not, that "the *modern* is better." Why, then, should we question that in the realm of *scientific* knowledge generally the same principle holds good?

Look at it in another way. I remember your keen interest in Art, and I have happy memories of more than one afternoon spent with you at the National Gallery. Suppose I challenged you to discuss with me the Science of the National Gallery, and told you that I was prepared to prove that there were many details in the pictures of the Old Masters that were not scientifically accurate. I can well imagine your scornful reply. You would

point out to me that Art and Science are quite different things, and that the artistic genius of a painting does not in the least depend upon its scientific accuracy of detail, or the scientific knowledge of the painter. Precisely! And so also are Religion and Science different things. The Bible is a book of Religion, not of Science. There is no single discovery of modern Science that *could not* have been a subject of Divine revelation ages ago, had the Divine Wisdom so decreed. Those things were *not* revealed, however. Man was left to make his own discoveries. Nor is it at all difficult to see the wisdom of this. One of the greatest blessings that have ever been bestowed upon the human race is the fact that man was compelled to be a seeker and a discoverer. His very ignorance has been his greatest incentive to progress. Just as in the educational realm no student could possibly get the full benefit of knowledge if everything were fully "revealed" to him at the beginning. He learns best through solving problems, mastering difficulties, and making slow and toilsome progress from the darkness of ignorance towards the noonday glory of understanding. Truly, "it was the glory of God to conceal a thing," and equally it has been the glory of man "to search out a matter." God did *not* reveal exact scientific truth to primitive man, whether in the Bible or out of it. Had He done so, it would have availed nothing, for primitive man could not possibly have understood or made use of the knowledge. The development of knowledge and of the practical capacity to make use of it grow side by side.

The scientific statements in the Bible, or rather

the statements that deal directly or indirectly with the subject matter of Science, for, strictly speaking, there are no "scientific statements" in the Bible, are interesting to us as revealing the standard of knowledge and the general ideas of the time. Beyond that their value is *nil*. The fuller knowledge and understanding that are the product of modern scientific research make it clear that many of those primitive conceptions were altogether wrong. Others were imperfect rather than wrong, and reveal the glimmering of an understanding that we have been able to develop in more adequate ways.

I have read many books that seek to prove that Scripture and Science are not at variance, and again I recognise the devotion and earnestness that have prompted these attempts to "defend the Faith." But, frankly, they "leave me cold." I am neither convinced by the arguments, nor can I see that they are of the least practical value either to Religion or to Science. It seems to me that nearly all this zeal to prove that the Bible records are scientifically accurate is altogether misplaced. It is beyond question that the attempts have *not* succeeded, but even if they had, I fail to see what benefit would accrue. The moral and spiritual power of the Book and of its message is not in the least enhanced if we can prove such scientific accuracy, nor is it in the least diminished if we cannot.

It is also worth remembering that a tremendous amount of positive harm has been done by this obscuring of the real issue. The supreme value of

the Bible is in its spiritual message, and its supreme purpose is to proclaim that message. The outstanding and inevitable effect of our spending so much time and zeal in the discussion of non-essentials is to divert attention from essentials, and, through the unsatisfactory nature of our defence of the former, we raise a prejudice against the latter. If we insist that the Bible must be accepted as scientifically accurate, the intelligent man outside the churches, "whose name is Legion," and who knows that our claim will not bear minute investigation, is inevitably led to think that there is probably not much more ground for the claims we make on behalf of the spiritual message of the Book. He is unable to accept the Bible scientifically, and hence he rejects it altogether. And *we* are responsible for the tragedy. You spoke about "godless" Science. It is a misnomer, but even if it be true that many scientists, and many more who accept modern scientific teaching, are "godless," or at least non-religious, who's to blame? We are. The scientist knows only one court of appeal: it is Truth. What are the facts? is the question that he is continually and consistently asking. He exemplifies that great word of the writer of Proverbs, "Buy the truth, and sell it not." He "buys" it at the price of unremitting toil, painstaking research, and, if need be, of obloquy and scorn and persecution. He refuses to "sell" it for any traitorous thirty pieces of silver, as he would do if he shut his eyes to what he knows to be facts, simply because verses of Scripture can be quoted against him.

How humiliating it is for us Christians when we

survey the history of scientific progress! That progress has been one of the most wonderful, and glorious, and awe-inspiring things in human history. It might have been, it ought to have been, from first to last, a great *religious* movement. It *would* have been if the Church had been wise enough to proclaim the one and only great scientific truth that she is qualified, and by the Bible authorised, to insist upon—"In the beginning God," and had then given her blessing to those who sought "to think God's thoughts after Him." The Church's faith in God as the God of Truth, and as "the Creator of the ends of the earth," should have led her to welcome the activities of those of her children who sought to understand more fully the wonder of that creation, and of the Divine method and purposes. The whole movement might have been "from faith to faith."

But instead of that, what actually happened? At almost every step of the way the Church hampered and hindered and forbade. Almost every great victory of Science has been won, not by the help of the Church, but in spite of the opposition of the Church. A misplaced zeal for "the Truth" has been the biggest hindrance to the progress of Truth. Of course, the progress has been made in spite of the opposition, but can we wonder that, increasingly, those who are concerned about that progress have come to be impatient of the opposition, and that many of them have been led to take what you call a "godless" attitude? It is *not* "godless," even though it be non-religious, for no man who has a real reverence for Truth, as every

genuine scientist has, can be altogether out of relation, whether consciously or unconsciously, to Him who is the Truth.

Moreover, when we survey the history of scientific progress, and of religious opposition, we see that, almost invariably, the latter has passed through two stages. First of all it has met any new knowledge, or any new explanation of familiar phenomena, with direct denial. It has supported the old, and defied the new, by appeal to the authority of particular texts of Scripture. If scientists declared that the earth was round, and not flat, as had been for so long supposed, it could quote texts which referred to "the ends of the earth," and obviously if the earth had ends it could *not* be round. If Copernicus asserted that the earth moved round the sun, and not *vice versa*, it could quote "the world also is established that it cannot be moved," and similar passages. But in course of time the new knowledge establishes itself, in spite of all such textual opposition, even though it be backed by the might of the secular and ecclesiastical arms, and all the terrors of the Inquisition. It prevails, simply because it happens to be true. Then when the Church has been no longer able to deny what has been so triumphantly demonstrated, she has quietly altered her tactics, and has searched the Scriptures again, and found texts that are in harmony with the newly-discovered facts, and she has then declared, Behold the harmony between Science and Revelation! I am putting it somewhat bluntly, but not inaccurately. Take the records of more recent times. When geological research began to produce evidence of the great

age of the earth, the issue was joined between Genesis and Geology. Geology *could not* be right, for did not Genesis assert that the world was created in six days, somewhere about 4000 years B.C. ? But the geological evidence accumulated, and became so overwhelming and unanswerable, that the defenders of the old view were forced to revise their arguments. They began to assert that the Bible was in harmony with Science, for the days of Creation meant indefinitely long periods, or alternatively, that there is an interval between the first verse of Genesis i. and all that follows, and that that interval accounts for all that Geology can say. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out the significance of the fact that the fundamentalist hosts are divided into two camps on this particular point. A vast amount of devotion and ingenuity have been expended on the exposition of both lines of interpretation. But it is the simple truth to say that, *on the fundamentalist view of Scripture*, both are " disloyal to the Bible." For both decline to accept what the Bible actually says, and read into it something that is not there, which never even remotely entered into the conception of the Bible writers. The attempts to prove that the days of the Creation narrative mean periods of indefinite length are well-meaning but baseless exegetical manipulations. It may be quite correct to describe Creation as proceeding by the method of indefinitely slow progress, but Genesis certainly does not say so, or even imply it. Moreover, it is somewhat puzzling to find that many who accept the period interpretation are nevertheless uncompromisingly hostile to Evolution, although Evolu-

tion simply means that. Again, those who, like the writer of *The Scripture of Truth*, are consistent and frank enough to admit that the "days" of Genesis mean days of twenty-four hours, and *can* mean nothing else, are equally unjustified in reading what they do into the Scripture record. Mr. Collett says, "The first verse of the Bible ('In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth') *must* be taken as standing absolutely alone, pointing us back through untold ages to the original creation of the earth and the heavens. . . . Now Gen. i. 2, which tells us that 'the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep,' describes, not the condition of the earth as in verse 1, when it was *originally* created, but that altered condition in which it was just before God 'made,' or reconstituted, or prepared it to be the dwelling place of man. . . . It was this reconstitution or preparation of the earth for man which took place about six thousand years ago, and occupied six days." All this, again, is very ingenious, but *it is not what the Bible says*.

Recall again the very ingenious theory that Dr. Philip Gosse put forth to reconcile Genesis and Geology. As a scientist he could not dispute the fact of the fossils, while as a thoroughgoing believer in verbal inspiration he could not admit for one moment that the Bible record could be in error. Hence he suggested, and sincerely thought that in so doing he was rendering service both to Science and Religion, that God created the fossils *as such*! And he was keenly disappointed and chagrined when he found that his devout "reconciliation" was

simply laughed out of court. The scientists, of course, would not give it credence for a moment, while sane religious thought was conclusively expressed in the robust common-sense comment of Charles Kingsley, that he "could not believe that God had written on the rocks one enormous and superfluous lie."

One cannot escape the same consciousness of futility and unsatisfactoriness about nearly all the attempted reconciliations and harmonisings. Let me quote one or two of Mr. Collett's examples: "Job xxvi. 7, 'He hangeth the earth upon nothing.' Is not that simple statement scientifically accurate . . . describing the poising of our globe in space?" Again, "In Prov. viii. 27 we read that when God created the world 'He set a compass (or circle) upon the face of the deep,' clearly indicating its spherical or globular shape." Again, "Job xxvi. 7 tells us, 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place.' The scientific accuracy of these words has recently been most remarkably demonstrated; Professor Barnard of the Yerkes Observatory having discovered that there is a vast expanse in the northern heavens *without a single star in it*!—literally an 'empty space.'" And so on and so on. Apart from the exceedingly far-fetched nature of many of these "reconciliations," is there not a perfectly amazing futility about them? Can we really hope to win the ordinary respect of men for the Bible by putting forward such arguments? Why cannot we be courageous enough to give up our hide-bound theories, and frankly and gratefully acknowledge that the Bible is *not* a scientific book, and that it

never claims to be, and that what "science" it does contain is simply in accord with the crude and imperfect scientific ideas of its own day? If we do this, we reap a double advantage, with no corresponding loss. We free the Bible from controversies that are sadly hindering it from doing its divinely appointed work of proclaiming *spiritual* truth, and we leave ourselves free to welcome, and to recognise as equally divine, the scientific truth that God is revealing to us through the work of those who are "thinking His thoughts after Him."

Let me close this all too lengthy letter by quoting some words of Studdert Kennedy that sum up a good deal of what I have been saying. "Science had to fight religion for the right to seek after Truth. It has its saints and martyrs from Galileo downwards. They are every whit as much God's saints and martyrs as St Stephen or St Paul. The spectacle of Galileo sitting up in prison repeating the seven penitential Psalms, because he dared to differ from Moses and the theologians, and of poor Descartes burning his book *On the World* in case he got into trouble too, must have made the angels weep, if it did not make them laugh. That nonsense was the result of pride. Men suffered from what Hilary of Tours calls '*irreligiosa solicitudo pro Deo*,' a blasphemous anxiety to do God's work for Him. They had to protect God's truth because He could not look after it Himself. We still suffer from that form of pride and of fear. There are still men who would persecute their political and theological opponents if they could." I would only supplement that by saying that I for one gladly

recognise that a great deal of the "irreligious solicitude on behalf of God," of which I have been writing, is not due to pride but to a genuine and earnest devotion. But that fact only makes it all the more pitiable.

XIX

THE MODERN IS BETTER

I SCARCELY anticipated that my last letter would appeal to you. If you trouble to reread it at any time, I hope you will take note of what I said in its opening paragraphs—viz., that I did not write as a scientist, or with any qualification to express the scientific point of view. I simply tried to explain how the matter appealed to me as a modern non-scientific Bible reader. Please bear that fact in mind as you read this further letter also, in which I shall try to meet some of your criticisms.

Well, then, you tell me that my remarks about the futility of so many of the attempted harmonisings between the facts of modern Science and the ancient words of Scripture, show an inability to appreciate the wonder of the Book that is scarcely creditable to a Christian minister. You assure me that every such harmony that can be established gives you a deeper assurance of the marvellous inerrancy of inspiration, and also that all the passages where such harmony has not yet been established, and where there *appears* to be contradiction, will eventually be seen in the same clear light. Where there is lack, or apparent lack of harmony, it is because Science has not yet come to a perfect understanding. When it does, you are sure its findings

will be found to harmonise perfectly with the Scripture records.

If the matter appeals to you in this way, and you find that such a line of reasoning strengthens your faith in, and deepens your love for, the Bible, it is not for me to say you nay. I can only say that it does not appeal to me in that way. The number of cases in which there is *not* harmony between the assured results of modern Science and the statements of scientific ideas of Bible writers, is far too numerous to justify your optimism. Moreover, as I pointed out before, the modern is so palpably better, and richer in practical benefits, that even the most rigid fundamentalist would, if it came to a practical issue, repudiate the suggestion that we should return to the older conceptions. Do you seriously believe, for instance, that modern medical and psychological science will eventually abandon its study of the brain and nervous system, and will return to the old Biblical conception of the heart being the organ of some emotions, the bowels of others, the kidneys (or reins) of others, and so on? Of course you don't, and this is but one instance out of a multitude, in which you gladly abandon the imperfect Biblical conceptions for the more satisfactory conceptions of modern knowledge. Again, do the passages you quote as instances of harmony really bear all the weight that you put upon them? If some of the ancient Biblical poets did use poetic figures like those I quoted in my last letter—"He hangeth the earth upon nothing," "He set a compass upon the face of the deep," "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place," and many other similar passages to which the harmonisers are fond of

referring—and if it be true, as it is, that many of these poetic figures are apt and accurate, is it not a very wooden method of reading poetry if we seek in them a literal revelation of scientific truth? Or if you say that it is not so much that they revealed exact scientific truth, as that the writers were so directed and protected by the Inspiring Spirit that they were led to use only such poetic figures as were in accord with the literal truth, even though that truth should not be discovered in its fullness until thousands of years later; one can only reply that the writers used many other figures to which this argument does *not* apply. For instance, I was this morning reading the 18th Psalm, in which is this passage: "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind." As religious poetry that is sublime, but if you seek to "harmonise" it with scientific knowledge you reduce it to bathos.

Again, it is not amiss to point out that some of the most fruitful lines of modern scientific research are those in which ideas are worked out, the germ of which is found in the speculations of the poet-philosophers of ancient Greece. For instance, the Atomic Theory is found, in germ, in the writings of

Democritus, born 460 B.C. Are you going to claim divine inspiration for these ancient thinkers? If not, why not? If there is wonderful evidence of divine inspiration in the fact that Job used a poetic phrase, "He hangeth the earth upon nothing," which long after Job's time is found to harmonise with the fact that our globe is poised in space, why should we not recognise the influence of the Divine Spirit in the mind of the Greek thinker, especially so in view of the far greater practical value of his thought?

The relation between modern and ancient knowledge has a two-fold significance. On the one hand, the modern has in large measure superseded the ancient. A great number of the ideas and conceptions and beliefs of ancient times have been shown to be utterly wrong, and they have been completely superseded by the truer ideas of to-day. They "had their day," but they have now "ceased to be." Their value for us is *nil*, and the only interest that attaches to them is a historical one. On the other hand, however, a great deal of modern knowledge is a development of ancient ideas and conceptions. The ancient was not so much wrong as crude and imperfect. The Higher Mathematics of to-day is a development rather than a supersession of Euclidian and other ancient mathematical conceptions, and the same thing is true in many other fields of knowledge. Nor is any other situation conceivable. The ancients obviously did not, and could not, know everything that we know. And equally they were not, and could not be, in total ignorance of everything we know. And what

is true in this respect of the ancients generally, is true of the Biblical writers. They were the children of their age, and they reflect the ideas of their age. Whatever was the method of divine inspiration and revelation, we have no warrant whatever for supposing that inspiration lifted the writers above all local and temporal limitations. Had they *not* reflected the ideas of their age, and expressed themselves in the thought-forms that harmonised with the current knowledge of their age, their message would have been meaningless to their age, and to a good many subsequent ages. In a word, it is not in the least surprising that we find in the Bible many ideas and expressions and items of knowledge that *do* harmonise with the larger and fuller knowledge of to-day. But equally it is not in the least surprising that we find in the Bible many ideas and expressions and conceptions that do *not* so harmonise, and which never will be made to harmonise, except by the method of putting back the clock, and giving the lie to all the progress of the centuries. And, surely, there is no real difficulty in this. It accords with reason and with common sense, and also with all that the Bible tells us about itself. The only thing it does *not* accord with, is a rigid mechanical theory of inspiration. And, as that theory is purely a human invention, it means that the only real difficulty in the Bible *versus* Science question is one of our own devising. There are no scientific difficulties at all to the man who is content to take the Bible as it is, and to read it in the light of its own facts and claims. The difficulties only arise when we insist on reading the Bible through the distorting spectacles of our

man-made theories of what inspiration *ought* to mean.

I come now to another point in your letter. You ask if I will kindly let you know how I "do condescend to interpret" the Creation story in Genesis, seeing that I am unwilling to accept it as a true record; or is it one of the many chapters that I have allowed the critics to cut out of my Bible? I must first of all enter a kindly but very definite protest against the way you express yourself. It really is not worthy of you. It savours too much of that bigotry and misrepresentation that so often disgrace religious discussion, but from which I hoped we should keep free in our correspondence. Surely we can meet each other's arguments frankly and fairly without resorting to unworthy insinuations. You and I played football together in the old days, and we both indulged in, and enjoyed, hefty shoulder charges. But we should have been ashamed to resort to tripping and other unfair tactics. Let us still "play the game." Apart altogether from my personal attitude, and any objections you have to my views, it isn't playing the game to talk about the critics "cutting pages out of the Bible." I have read in some of your fundamentalist literature a moving story of a dear old saint who loved his Bible, and nourished his soul on its teaching through long years. Then he began to read what the critics were saying, and he took his penknife and cut out chapter after chapter that the critics told him were not inspired, until at last his dearly loved Book was completely in shreds. That story, and all similar ones, may be very pathetic, but I do not hesitate

to describe it as a grotesque and malicious fabrication. For one thing, no saint of God who knew and loved his Bible, and who through long years had proved its worth and power, would cut out any of it, even though ten thousand critics told him to do so. Moreover, anyone whose mentality was of such an order that he would do such a foolish thing, would not be in the least likely to read what the critics say, or to understand it if he did. The critics do presuppose a certain level of intelligence and common sense on the part of their readers. Again, the modern critics do not presume to say what is, and what is not, inspired. Their whole conception of what inspiration means makes such a thing impossible, and they do not waste their time in any such folly. If you would only take the trouble to read what criticism really has to say for itself, and not be content to accept misrepresentations of it at the hands of those who have never taken the trouble to understand it, you would clearly see how utterly absurd, and how grossly unfair, are many of the anti-critical onslaughts. To controvert the arguments of the critics is quite legitimate, and if you and your friends *can* controvert them, the critics themselves will be the first to thank you. All that the critics are seeking is the truth, and if you can successfully controvert their arguments, and thereby prove that they are on wrong lines in their search, they will be grateful to you for pointing out where they are wrong and, by so doing, helping them to get upon right lines. Fair opposition to criticism is, then, quite legitimate. A misunderstanding of criticism is, also, not necessarily blameworthy, for a great many technical

points are involved, and their full significance is not always clearly seen by the untrained reader. But the deliberate and often malicious misrepresentation of criticism is utterly unworthy and inexcusable. And the amount of such misrepresentation that is abroad is perfectly appalling, and makes one blush for the fair fame of the Christian cause.

XX

THE HIGH PLACE OF POETRY

I WANT in this letter to attempt an answer to your question as to how I interpret the Creation narrative in Genesis. Please bear in mind that in so doing I am simply giving you my own impressions. I have not looked up the modern commentaries and sought to summarise what they say, though I owe much to them, and I have on my shelves such books as Ryle's *Early Narratives of Genesis*, and Driver's *Commentary on Genesis*, which, by the way, I can heartily commend to you if you want to know what modern scholarship has to say on the question.

Well, then, the first impression that is made on my mind when I read the narrative is, that it is a wonderful piece of poetry. I can well imagine the snort of contempt with which you will receive such a confession. You will think I am obscuring the issue, and trying to explain away under poetic symbols what to you is a plain straightforward statement of fact. I doubt not that you willingly accept the assertion of Mr. G. H. Pember in his book, *Earth's Earliest Ages*, that "The first chapter of Genesis, equally with those that follow it, is, in its primary meaning, neither vision nor allegory, but plain history, and must, therefore, be accepted as a literal statement of facts." And you will also think that my speaking of it as poetry justifies what you

said about my "unwillingness to accept it as a true record." But, as a matter of fact, it is precisely because I do read it as poetry that I am convinced that it *is* a true record. Surely it is beyond question that poetry is a higher medium for the expression of truth than prose can ever be. Prose may give us greater accuracy of detailed statement, but the highest truth is beyond the possibility of such accuracy of detailed statement. Poetry is far more than a matter of fanciful prettiness and sentimental extravagance. Even poetic licence is not a lawless liberty to say things that have no relation to reality: it is a freedom to get down to reality in a way that is impossible by prosaic methods. Poetry, again, is far more than a matter of using poetic forms of speech, such as rhymes and metres. You may have the essence of poetry though it be expressed in the form of prose. Do we not often find, in listening to a noble speaker or in reading the works of a prose writer, that, when they rise to their highest levels of thought, their utterances take on an eloquence and loftiness of expression that are far more moving, and that bring us far nearer the heart of the truth they are seeking to express, than any bald and concisely accurate statement could do? In fact, the highest truths can *only* be expressed in this way. Poetry, in a word, is their natural and inevitable form of expression.

You may reply that in the first chapters of Genesis we have a prose narrative. Granted; but not even the most unimaginative reader could describe it as *bald* prose. It has an unmistakable loftiness and nobility of diction which is truly poetic, even though it be not expressed in technical poetic

forms. The Bible, of course, has an abundance of similar examples of poetic prose, particularly in the writings of the Prophets, or in some of the vivid descriptive passages in the Book of Revelation. But whatever may be the actual form in which these early chapters are written, it is surely impossible to read them with the feeling that they contain nothing but prosaic literalness of statement. If you tell me that I must believe that the whole story of the creation of the universe is given in exact and literal scientific detail in a single chapter, I can only reply that it makes a demand on me that neither my Christian faith nor my ordinary credulity can rise to. To me the whole thing is utterly inconceivable and impossible. But it is of the very essence of poetry that it can express or suggest in a phrase or sentence what bald prose could far less adequately express in a chapter. And it is this poetic suggestiveness that increasingly impresses me as I study the Creation narrative. We do not pay the writer a compliment—we do not render him even ordinary respect—if we insist on giving a literal prosaic interpretation to his words. Do we not, indeed, defeat our own ends when we make the attempt? We want to know the truth, but by our very insistence on literal exactness we miss the truth. Take a parallel case. Suppose we critically examine and analyse George Macdonald's beautiful poem,

> Where did you come from, Baby dear?
> 'Out of the everywhere into here.'

—and ask the question, Is it true? Are its statements scientifically accurate? Of course it isn't true. Every one of its stanzas is a ridiculous and extrava-

gant absurdity. Ah, but it *is* true, gloriously and sublimely so, with that higher Truth which, as Tennyson says, is sister to Beauty and Goodness. And it is that higher Truth that shines through the Creation story.

Remember, again, that it was a product of primitive times, and that in those times Creation legends and myths were commonplaces in every nation's folklore. We have the record of some of the folklore myths of the Semitic peoples from whom the Hebrew nation sprang, and with whom they were more or less in contact throughout their history. Hence it is almost certain that many of these stories were familiar to them. It is also certain that there are many points of contact and resemblance between these stories and the Genesis narrative. In fact even so conservative a scholar as Professor Sayce, whose books are so often quoted by fundamentalists, tells us that "the Assyrian epic bears a striking resemblance to the account of it (the Creation) given in the first chapter of Genesis. In each case the history of the Creation is divided into seven successive acts; in each case the present world has been preceded by a watery chaos. In fact the self-same word is used of this chaos in both the Biblical and the Assyrian accounts, the only difference being that in the Assyrian story 'the deep' has become a mythological personage, the mother of a chaotic brood. The order of the Creation, moreover, agrees in the two accounts." There are also other, and earlier, Creation narratives than the one to which this passage refers, which have been brought to light by those who have deciphered the cuneiform tablets. Hence,

even if we lightly dismiss all these as mere myths and legends, and claim that the Genesis account is the only true one, it is perfectly obvious that the latter does not stand alone and altogether out of all connection and association with the former. But when we compare the narratives, we find not only striking points of resemblance and similarity, but equally striking points of difference. The non-Biblical records are polytheistic, and tell of the operations and activities, often grotesque and repellent, of various divinities at different stages of the creative process. And that, of course, is typical of nearly all ancient and non-Biblical mythology.

Now, with these facts in mind, read again the Genesis story. Its writer was certainly familiar with the current stories, and what he gives us is a reinterpretation of them from an entirely new view-point. As he ponders them, and the great theme with which they deal, he is overwhelmed by the sublimity of one all-important fact—the fact of GOD. He sees everything, and interprets everything in the light of that fact. It is the thread of gold that runs through his story—" In the beginning GOD . . . and GOD said . . . and GOD saw . . . and GOD made." Everywhere, and in all things, the Source of all, and the Maker of all is—GOD. The whole conception is sublime. There is nothing comparable to it in ancient literature, sacred or secular. The wondrous theme of the poem is not so much the Creation as the Creator. There is only one possible explanation of the fact that in those times and circumstances such a sublime conception should have filled any man's mind, and that explanation is what we describe as *Inspiration*. As far as I

am concerned, I am prepared unhesitatingly to say this: that if there were no other evidence, I should believe in the fact of divine inspiration on the evidence of that chapter alone. But when you ask me questions about *scientific* accuracy I feel you are dragging the whole matter down from the sublime to the commonplace.

Do you remember Mrs. Browning's poem:

> Earth's crammed with heaven,
> And every common bush aflame with God.
> But only he who sees takes off his shoes,
> The rest sit round and pick blackberries"?

To discuss the scientific accuracy of the details of the great Creation poem seems to me perilously akin to "sitting round and picking blackberries." I know the blackberries are real enough, and useful enough, in their way—they are the scientific facts! But if we spend our time in picking them, we may very easily miss seeing that "earth's crammed with heaven," and that the very bushes are "aflame with God."

I would suggest to you, moreover, that if you will bear in mind this elementary canon of interpretation—that poetry should be read *as* poetry—you will find that it illumines many passages of Scripture that are otherwise obscure. Particularly in the writings of the Prophets. I have a worthy friend who is a great Bible student, and who is especially interested in the prophecies. One of his axioms is that every prophecy has had, or will have, an exact and literal fulfilment. It is very devout, but, again, how *wooden* it is! Take, as an illustration selected almost at random, the prophetic word

of the writer of the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, in which he raises the hopes, and cheers the spirits of the exiles in Babylon, as he sings of their coming deliverance and return to their own land: "In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Was that *literally* fulfilled? Of course not. But was it any the less inspired, and inspiring? It *was* true, even though it was not *literally* true.

Just a final word on the Bible *versus* Science question. There has been a great deal of talk about the warfare between Science and Religion. But ought we not to recognise that such a warfare is impossible? Conflict between the teachings of scientists and theologians is possible, but not between Science and Religion. Any apparent conflict between them must be due to a misunderstanding on the part of their interpreters. Truth must be one, though it may have many aspects, and may be interpreted from many different viewpoints. If I ask a botanist and an artist respectively to give me a description of a flower, I shall get two very different answers, and it may not be easy in every respect to harmonise them. I am not so foolish, therefore, as to speak about a warfare between Science and Art. I recognise that each is looking at the one truth under a different aspect

and with a different purpose. Each interpretation is true for its own purpose, and from its own standpoint. Science has its own realm, where its own standards and laws are paramount. And Art has its realm, with its standards and laws. Each is monarch in its own domain. And Religion is in like case. If the religious man wants to know anything about scientific truth he must allow Science to be his teacher. Religion, as such, has no authority in that realm. And, equally, the scientist can never discover, or disprove, spiritual truth by the application of his scientific methods. The scientific method of the botanist is legitimate and valuable for the scientific explanation of the flower, but those methods can never avail to explain the beauty that the artist sees in the flower. Science can do much to explain the facts and laws of the material universe, but Science alone cannot explain or interpret the spiritual realities behind the material facts. The scientist may be, as he often is, a religious man, but it is not the exercise of his scientific faculties alone that makes him so. He is religious in so far as he realises that there are aspects and domains of Truth beyond the scientific ken, which can only be apprehended by the exercise of his spiritual faculties. In the past, two great mistakes have often been made. On the one hand, those who have spoken in the name of Religion have often illegitimately claimed the right to dominate Science by Religion, not in the sense of asserting the superiority of spiritual to material truth, but in the sense of insisting that the latter must only be interpreted in terms that harmonise with the current ideas of the former. In other words, that Religion, or rather

Theology, which is the intellectual expression of Religion, has the right to the deciding word in the domain of scientific truth. Science has rightly resented this claim, and has refused to acknowledge it. Hence the "warfare" that has been waged so fiercely in the past, and in which the theologians have been so thoroughly worsted. Science has claimed that scientific truths are true in their own right, so to speak, and that if Theology refuses to acknowledge them, so much the worse for Theology. And Science has been absolutely right in taking this attitude, and we can be glad that the great majority of present-day theologians have learnt wisdom from the mistakes of their predecessors, and no longer fall into the same error. On the other hand, however, the scientists have sometimes fallen into a similar error from the opposite side. Because the application of the scientific method has achieved such triumphant results in its own sphere, some who use it have illegitimately claimed for it the right to authority in *all* spheres. If Theology has sometimes made the mistake of claiming the right to the last word in the realm of Science, Science has sometimes made the mistake of claiming the right to the last word in the realm of Theology. Because Science has discovered and elucidated such vast realms of truth, its advocates have sometimes mistakenly imagined that those realms are the whole of truth, and that nothing has any claim to our allegiance unless it can pass the scientific test of truth. But Science also has learned wisdom, and no longer ventures to assert that because it has won such triumphs in the material sphere, a materialistic philosophy is the last word of ultimate truth. As

Sir Oliver Lodge said recently, "Science gives us truth, but it does not give us all the truth." Science realises to-day that while it has sovereign rights in its own domain, there are more ultimate and fundamental questions that lie outside that domain, and it leaves them to be dealt with by the more fundamental disciplines of Philosophy and Theology.

XXI

PROPHECY

WHEN in my last letter I made reference to the interpretation of prophetic poetry, I did not realise that I was laying myself open to another challenge. You want to know how I meet the "argument from prophecy." I am not quite sure what you mean. The form of your question implies that you think the argument from prophecy controverts what I have been saying, and that therefore I have to "meet" it. Are you thinking that modern Biblical scholarship ignores the prophecies, and that in those prophecies there is that which disproves the validity of the modern view-point? If so, I can only assure you that there is no part of Scripture on which modern scholarship has shed more light than it has on the writings of the Prophets. If you want proof of that, read Dr. George Adam Smith's "The Book of Isaiah" and "The Book of the Twelve Prophets" in *The Expositor's Bible*. They will be an education to you.

It is quite true, of course, that modern scholarship looks at the prophetical writings in a somewhat different way from that in which they are regarded by the upholders of the verbal inerrancy theory. The latter theory logically involves that there is a meaning, whether of mystic symbolism or of literal truth, in every word and phrase, and hence its

study becomes almost inevitably a matter of minute and painstaking search to find the hidden meanings of every word and phrase, and then to fit them into a consistent whole. In short, it is like the working out of a wonderful jig-saw puzzle. I do not say that offensively, but when one remembers the amazing ingenuity of much popular prophetical interpretation, and the wonderful and elaborate systems that are its product, it is not an untrue description. The devotion that is often given to the task is manifest to even the most unsympathetic critic, but devotion and earnestness do not of themselves guarantee the truth of the method, and with equal devotion, and love for the Bible, one may ask, Is that the right method of prophetical interpretation ?

The old method has certainly had abundant opportunity to justify itself, but can we honestly say that it has succeeded in so doing ? Is it not in fact condemned by its very successes ? It has worked out its schemes in a most elaborate and intricate way, and each scheme seems very logical and convincing until we remember that other interpreters, of equal orthodoxy and devotion, and equally accepting the doctrine of verbal inerrancy, work out schemes that are utterly and irreconcilably different. One has only to recall how the prophetical interpretation hosts are divided into the two great sections of Pre-millenarians and Post-millenarians, whose respective lines of interpretation are as far asunder as the Poles. Can you wonder that this fact alone is sufficient to lead many earnest Bible students to ask if it is not at least possible that neither of these two lines is

correct, and that the truth can only be discovered by following an entirely different method?

Again, think of the harm that has been done to the Christian cause by the absurd extravagances for which the old methods have been responsible. During the war a tremendous impetus was given to prophetical studies, as had often happened before in times of great national and international upheaval, but the result of it all came perilously near to making the Christian religion a laughing-stock. Like most ministers I received quite a host of books and pamphlets on the subject. Most of them I threw into the fire, but a few I kept as curiosities. One of them gave a detailed forecast of the final Battle of Armageddon, which was to mark the close of the present age and usher in the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ. The forces of the whole world were to be assembled in the two hosts of Christ and Anti-Christ, and the battle was to result in the complete overthrow and destruction of the latter. Of course the worthy writer of this weird production gave chapter and verse for all his assertions. It never seemed to occur to him to wonder how it was going to be possible to gather together the forces of the whole world on the very limited area of the Plains of Esdraelon, where the battle was to take place—an area that could not hold a fiftieth part of the armies that were gathered in France alone. And, far worse still, it never appeared to strike him as in the least incongruous that the triumph of the Prince of Peace was to be finally achieved by an orgy of slaughter that was to be far more awful than the most appalling horrors of the Great War. And this was put forward as *Christian*

teaching, and as an exposition of the Christian Scriptures!

You may say that I have chosen a somewhat extravagant example to illustrate my point. But the same sort of extravagance is found, in greater or less degree, in all the expositions that set out from that particular starting-point, which seek to prove that the Prophetical Books give us a chart of history. I have read many such expositions, and I have not found one that does not contain inconsistencies, incongruities, and often extravagant absurdities. Such things are, in fact, inherent in the very method, and not even the sanest exponent of the method can altogether escape them. Surely the extravagances, joined with the fact that, as we have already noted, it is possible to work out at least two complete but mutually contradictory schemes, are fairly conclusive presumptive evidence that the method itself is wrong.

I gather that you yourself are one of those who find satisfaction in the pre-millenarian teaching which is so popular to-day in many orthodox quarters, and I would like to suggest to you a simple but illuminating little test. Read the history of that particular school of interpretation —not "modernist" criticisms of it, but its own records. When you find, as you will do, that it has had a most chequered career, and that, starting with the same premises each time, it has nevertheless succeeded in working out very diverse schemes, each one fitting in exactly with the circumstances of the particular period that produced it, but collapsing ignominiously when actual history has refused to work out according to the confident pre-

dictions; when you find, for example, that the mysterious "number of the Beast" has been quite conclusively *proved* to refer to the Pope, Napoleon, and many other famous but unpopular historic figures, to say nothing of its reference to an unpopular monarch of our own day, you will hardly be able to escape an uncomfortable suspicion that perhaps it does not refer to any of them, and hence that all the schemes that work out such results, including those that hold the field to-day, are on wrong lines altogether. During the time of the Second Empire, one of the most prominent of the prophetical experts in this country published a large volume entitled *Napoleon III the Destined Ruler of the World.* Think of it! Is it not a degradation of God's Book when we treat it as a sort of glorified Old Moore's Almanac? Is it really conceivable that it was part of the Divine purpose to "write history beforehand" under the form of mysterious symbols, and then to leave it to be puzzled over by all succeeding generations? Especially so when we see how the attempted solutions of the puzzle have so often brought the Bible, and the Christian cause, into utter discredit.

Having said all this I do not propose to go on to an exposition of the books concerned, and to offer you an alternative solution of the problem. There are plenty of modern commentaries that will do that for you. But let me suggest one or two points for your guidance. First, I think you will find that the key to the understanding of Daniel and Revelation is to be found not in their historic *predictions* but in their historic *setting.* They were the product of troublous times. The setting of Daniel is

the tragic Maccabean period, when the Jewish nation passed through such terrible fires of affliction. The setting of Revelation is in a similar period of affliction for the infant Church, owing to the outbreak of bitter persecution. The books were "Tracts for the Times." Their purpose was to give a message of hope and encouragement and assurance to the sufferers.

Secondly, I would point out that, although the particular literary form that the writers use is so strange and mysterious to us, it was not so, or at any rate it was far less so, to their contemporaries. We too easily imagine that the two books concerned stand absolutely alone, unique in both matter and method. That supposition is, in fact, the basis of nearly all the popular expositions. But in reality those two books are specimens of a type of literature that was widely used, and highly valued. The name given to it is "Apocalyptic." Many specimens of it have come down to us—the *Book of Jubilees*, the *Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the *Assumption of Moses*, the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, the *Book of Enoch*, and others. At least two, and possibly others, of these are actually quoted in the New Testament. The passage in Jude about Michael the Archangel is referred to by Origen, one of the greatest Biblical scholars of the early Church, as a quotation from the *Assumption of Moses*, though we are unable to confirm his statement, as the only manuscript of that book that we possess is incomplete. The quotation in Jude from the *Book of Enoch* is, however, quite definite. I notice that your friend, Mr. Collett, refers to that passage, and says, "It is not an uncommon thing for

the inspired writers of the New Testament to give in writing for the first time verbal utterances of the Old Testament saints. For example, in Jude 14 we read, 'The Lord shall come with ten thousand of his saints,' and yet there is no record in the whole of the Old Testament of this prophecy of Enoch." There is not, for it does not happen to be a "prophecy of Enoch." It is a quotation from the apocalyptic *Book of Enoch*, written in the second and first centuries B.C., and widely known and honoured both among Jews and Christians. Evidently Jude could quote from it with the assurance that his readers would understand his reference without his needing to elaborate or explain it.

Incidentally this throws light on another problem that greatly perplexes some people, the problem of pseudonymous writings.[1] When modern scholarship asserts that there are books in the Bible which bear names that are not, and cannot be, the names of the actual authors, it is often thought that it is exceeding the limits of reverence, to say the least. But there is abundant evidence that it was a well-known and widely used literary device of ancient times to issue books under the names of great heroes and leaders of the past. To us it seems perilously akin to literary forgery, but it was not so regarded then. Rather was it a recognised means of ascribing honour. There seems to have been among the ancients a very considerable lack of that thirst for personal literary fame that is so conspicuous among us moderns. No intelligent Jew would imagine that the *Book of Enoch* was written by Enoch

[1] I have before dealt with it incidentally, when discussing Isaiah and the Pentateuch.

simply because it was issued under his name. And when we find overwhelming evidence, as we certainly do, that the Book of Daniel was not written *by* Daniel, or the Books of Samuel *by* Samuel, or the so-called Books of Moses *by* Moses, or many of the Psalms that bear David's name *by* David, there is really no call for us to get into a panic and to imagine that the foundation pillars of the Bible are being undermined. It is simply a question that must be decided on the weight of evidence, and the mere fact that a book bears a particular name is not in itself complete and irrefutable evidence as to the actual authorship. Certainly, it cannot be taken as sufficient in itself to outweigh and invalidate all the other evidence that may be available for us, and which may point to an altogether different conclusion, especially so when most of that other evidence is actually provided for us by the books themselves. For instance, is it really a piece of irreverent and unbelieving criticism to point out that the Second Book of Samuel *could not* have been written by Samuel, in view of the fact that Samuel's own death is recorded before the end of the First Book, and that all that follows is history of the period subsequent to that event? And there is equally conclusive and irrefragable evidence for many other of the assertions and suggestions that are so often denounced as "destructive criticism."

But to return to the subject of Apocalyptic. There is another important aspect of the subject that should not be overlooked. In popular usage the term "student of prophecy" refers to one who specialises in the elucidation of the books of Daniel

and Revelation, though not, of course, to the exclusion of other prophetical writings. Those are, however, the books to which special reference is made. When we turn from popular usage to Biblical usage, however, we make the somewhat startling discovery that neither of those books is included among what the Bible calls prophetical writings. You know, of course, that the Jews divided their Scriptures into three groups: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The second group consisted of the Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings—and the Latter Prophets, also in four books—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve. The third group of "Writings" included Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. The grouping is very suggestive and significant. The fact that historical books like Joshua or Kings are called prophets, and that Daniel is not, certainly implies that the Jews considered prophecy in a somewhat different way from ours. In the case of Revelation it is true that there is a reference in it to "the words of the book of this prophecy," but at the same time the proper name of the book is the Apocalypse (translated "Revelation" in our English versions) of John, and there is a distinct and well-recognised difference between Prophecy and Apocalyptic, though the latter unquestionably contains a prophetic element. "Apocalyptic is the successor of prophecy, the form of religious admonition and instruction to which men had recourse who were conscious that for them there was no longer any 'open vision.' It is, therefore, at once the continuation of prophecy,

and sharply distinguished from it. The prophet speaks directly to the people; the apocalyptist writes in solitude what men may read in public (Rev. i. 3). The prophet speaks what God the Lord has spoken; what he speaks is afterwards committed to writing. The apocalyptist writes, describing what God the Lord has given him to see. The prophet is a speaker, an orator, a preacher. The apocalyptist is a *seer*, a ponderer of what he has seen, a student of what those before him have written" (Introduction to "Revelation" in *The Century Bible*). Again, "The books of this class have certain external characteristics in common. Thus they will be found usually to contain two elements, one of earnest exhortation to faithfulness, patience, and endurance, the other of prediction of the approaching end. For the apocalyptist there is no longer any hope of progress by development; he announces, and insists on, a crisis, a catastrophe, as the absolutely necessary introduction to a new era. The confusion, the sufferings, the disasters he describes, all move forward to a climax, but they are for him 'the beginnings of birth-pangs'; out of them is to come, for those who believe and endure, new life and a new world. This anticipation of catastrophe is one great motive of apocalyptic. It is religious because it recognises that this also comes from God. It is of faith and hope because it proclaims that the righteous shall be saved, yet so as by fire" (*ibid.*).

To sum up, I would venture to offer you two suggestions. In your study of these two books (Daniel and Revelation) you will find that a clear conception of what they really are, will be a very

great help towards understanding them, and it will certainly guard you against absurd extravagances of interpretation into which so many of their expositors have fallen. Secondly, in the interpretation of both prophecy and apocalyptic, the most useful equipment, granting prayerfulness and sincerity, consists of common sense and imagination. I stress the latter in spite of what I have said of the fanciful imaginings of the popular interpretations. The paradox is that these imaginings are too unimaginative. Imagination, rightly used, is not the faculty wherewith we build up fanciful and baseless conceptions. It is the faculty of seeing things *as they really are*. Also, don't be afraid to bring common sense into play. It is not the unspiritual quality that some worthy folk think. On the contrary, its exercise can be of great value both to Christian thought and Christian devotion. After all, it is a poor testimony to our religion if we have to divorce it from common sense. I am reminded of a man I once knew. He was the most thoroughgoing and earnest "student of prophecy" with whom I have ever come into personal contact, and his painstaking zeal aroused my wondering admiration. It was during the war, and he worked out his schemes in such a way that he was able to demonstrate with absolute conclusiveness how and when the war would end, and that the Coming of the Lord could not possibly be delayed more than about two years. The good man was absolutely convinced of the truth of what he said, and he anticipated the Lord's Coming with passionate eagerness, and besought others to prepare for it. But one day I was talking to him on ordinary matters,

and I asked him about certain premises for which he had been in negotiation with a view to the extension of his flourishing business. He replied that he had not taken them because the owners would only grant a seven-years' lease, whereas he insisted on a lease of twenty-one years! The man was not a hypocrite, nor was he in the least conscious of any inconsistency in his attitude, but his religion, or at any rate that part of it, was in a water-tight compartment that had not the remotest connection with his ordinary life. He is by no means a unique case. To put it bluntly, a little bit of imagination and common sense would have saved him from making himself ridiculous.

There are some other things I should like to say on the matter of prophecy, but I must defer them to my next letter.

XXII

SOCIAL RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE PROPHETS

I SHOULD like to supplement what I have said on the subject of Apocalyptic and its interpretation by saying something further about Scripture Prophecy. It is a subject about which there is a good deal of popular misconception. In popular thought and usage the dominant idea of prophecy is that of foretelling. The prophets of the Bible are thought of as men of unique divine endowments who were inspired by God to foretell future events. Their writings trace out the course of subsequent history, or at any rate deal with the outstanding events of that history, often with exact and literal detail.

Now, I am not going to set off by saying that this is all wrong, but I do suggest that it is very largely wrong. It is not an untruth, but it is a great exaggeration of a half-truth. No one can read the prophetic Scriptures without seeing that there is a predictive element in them, and in some cases very prominently so. But it is never dominant. Prediction was never the prophet's primary concern. As has often been pointed out, the prophet was a *forth*teller rather than a *fore*teller. He was a preacher rather than a prognosticator. He was one who interpreted the ways of God to men. He dealt with the problems of his own day, and his message was primarily to the men of his own

generation. His great theme was God's righteousness, and its practical bearing on human affairs. Hence the exceedingly practical note in the prophetic sermons, for such the prophet's utterances really were. They are concerned for the most part with religion, not so much in its personal and devotional aspects as we find it dealt with in the Psalms, but in its practical bearing upon the social and political problems of the day. In their fearless denunciation of social wrongs and injustices, of the heartless tyranny of wealth, and of the oppression of the poor, they did for their day what the prophets of social righteousness, whether inside or outside the Churches, are seeking to do in our day. The prophets were men with a "message for the times," and fearlessly they gave it forth. In passing, it may not be amiss to point out to those folk who look with deep suspicion and disfavour on all attempts to give a social application to the Christian message, and to bring religion to bear upon political and social issues, that the "deepening of the spiritual life," to quote their favourite phrase, is not the be-all and end-all of the religion of the Bible. Such deepening should be a definite object of Christian aspiration, but it has little value unless it is made the means to a greater end. If we always remembered that the Book which contains the devotional wealth of the Psalms contains also the passionate denunciations of social wrongs, and the burning pleas for social righteousness of Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah and other members of the great prophetic fraternity, we might often be led to give a more practical expression to our own devotions.

It is well to remember also that prophecy was a commonplace of Jewish life for centuries. We usually think of the prophets as a very small and select band of divinely inspired men; first of all, a few like Elijah and Elisha, of whose work we have record, but who left no writings, and secondly, the group of literary prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve. But this is hardly a complete reading of the facts as we have them in the Scripture records. For one thing there is the significant fact that I touched on in my last letter, that the Jews classified books of Scripture like Joshua, Samuel and Kings as Prophets, which is in itself convincing proof that they gave to the word a wider meaning than we do. Also, there are many references in the records to "schools" and to wandering bands of prophets. They were certainly not all divinely inspired foretellers of the future, but they evidently had a definite and well-recognised place in the national life. The records, both in the historical and the prophetical books, make it clear that the prophets were primarily seers and interpreters. And by seer is not meant one who sees into the future, but one who sees *into*—one who has insight into the deeper meaning of things. Because the prophet was a seer he was also an interpreter, interpreting those deeper meanings. He interpreted the moral issues of life, of political and social concerns, and above all, he interpreted the ways of God to man. And, in so doing, he often predicted. His insight into things enabled him often to see how those things would inevitably work out in the future; not necessarily in exact detail, but in broad general

outline. The prophet was convinced of the reality of the moral government of the world, and hence of the supremacy of moral truth, and the inevitability of the working out of moral issues. He saw clearly that the following of certain courses of conduct, whether by individuals or by nations, would lead inevitably to certain results, and he often foretold those results. Usually he spoke with a good deal of what we should call poetic licence. Most of the literary prophets were poets, and the noblest passages of their writings are in poetic form, though unfortunately they are printed as prose in our English version. Now, as I have said before, poetry does not speak in the language of mathematical precision and scientific accuracy of detail. Its method is rather to paint word-pictures, and the value of the pictures depends not on the minute detail of their treatment but on the broad general effect.

As to the general type of prophetic prediction, I think we can get some understanding of it from a modern illustration, although I recognise that it is a very inadequate one. For ten years or more before the outbreak of the Great War the late Lord Roberts was an enthusiastic advocate of National Service. His reading of the facts of history, and of the inner meaning of the diplomatic moves, and of the political ideas and tendencies of Modern Europe, led him to the conviction that things were inevitably tending towards a great European war, in which this country would be inevitably involved, and he tried to arouse his fellow-countrymen to the seriousness of the situation. Very largely he laboured in vain, and comparatively few paid any

heed to him. But when the war came, and his predictions were fulfilled, it was easy to acknowledge what a true prophet he had been. He had been a true prophet, but in what sense? Not by the exact foretelling of future events. He did not predict the Battle of the Marne, or the appointment of Marshal Foch, or the date of the Armistice. But he did foretell the general development of affairs. He saw into things that the average man was too busy, or too heedless, to notice. And he clearly perceived that if certain things went on as they were doing, and certain lines of national and international policy were persisted in, certain inevitable consequences would ultimately follow. And they did.

Now it is not irreverent to say that the prophets of the Old Testament were very much like that, though on a grander scale, and with a far deeper spiritual perception and significance. They saw whither things were tending. They saw what would be the inevitable result of certain lines of policy that the nation's rulers were blindly following. They saw that the national godlessness and iniquity *must* lead to disaster, and they painted their word-pictures of the judgment and doom that lay ahead.

But more than that: they were men of God, and their fundamental belief was in God's righteousness and its invincibility. Hence they did not believe that the judgment that loomed ahead was to be the last chapter of the story. They were sure that God's will, and God's righteousness and mercy would ultimately prevail, and so they paint a further picture of redemption and restoration, and of final

triumph for God's people. Sometimes they portray this consummation as something that shall happen soon; sometimes they speak rather of the great final triumph of God and of His cause, at the end of time. But always it is the broad general picture that is of importance, not the details of the poetic figures under which they portray it. I am not saying that there were *no* definite predictions, and *no* literal fulfilments, but a careful study of the prophetical writings will, I think, convince you that I am not misstating the broad general facts. Such a study will also, I think, lead you to realise that the supreme and abiding value of those writings for us is very largely in the fact that they do deal with broad issues rather than with details. If we stress the latter, and spend our time in minute search for detailed fulfilments, we shall fail to see the wood for the trees. We shall miss the practical note that gives the great prophets such value for our own day. "Mankind is ever advancing, but man is always the same." We can get a great deal of light upon our present-day problems, and a great deal of inspiration for dealing with them, from the ethical and spiritual teaching of the prophets. They are so intensely *modern*.

Another very interesting sidelight on the subject is provided by the Scriptures themselves. It is a commonplace to say that the Bible is its own best interpreter. It is, and it is a great pity that so many who make that assertion do not consistently apply it. If they did, they could hardly fail to see that their rigid method of prophetical interpreta-

tion is very different from the free method of the Bible itself. Let me illustrate what I mean by two examples. In the Nativity story as recorded by Matthew, he writes, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Now this is usually taken by the ordinary Bible reader as an outstanding and unmistakable instance of the exact and literal fulfilment of an ancient prophetic word, and I should not be in the least surprised if it has already suggested itself to you as a refutation of a good deal that I have been saying. But as a matter of fact it simply proves the truth of what I have just said about the *free* method of the Bible writers. If you will turn to the actual prophecy that Matthew quotes, you will find that it hasn't the least reference to the coming of Christ. There was no subject to which the Jewish rabbis and expositors gave more attention than the Messianic hope, and every Scripture reference to the Coming Deliverer was studied with minute and painstaking care. *There is no evidence that they ever interpreted the Emmanuel prophecy as Messianic.* Nor is that in the least surprising when we look at that prophecy in its original setting. In the seventh chapter of Isaiah we read of Ahaz, king of Judah, being sorely troubled by a confederacy of Syria and Ephraim against him. Isaiah brings to the despondent monarch a word of hope and assurance. The enemy shall not prevail. Deliverance shall come, even though the outlook should appear altogether

dark. And the prophet confirms his word with a sign: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. *For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.*"

The divines who placed the chapter headings in our Authorised Version say of that passage, "Ahaz hath for a sign, Christ promised." How could the promise of Christ be a sign of almost immediate deliverance to the king? Moreover, the prophet definitely says—it is the vital part of the sign—that the deliverance shall come before the child has grown out of childhood years, before he shall "know to refuse good and evil." The king was full of fear, and he had also lost faith. The prophet rebukes both the fear and the faithlessness by his assertion that a young woman (that is what the Hebrew word means, and it does not convey the idea of a *virgin*-birth) who is alive at that time —for any future reference would rob the sign of all its significance—would give her baby a name that expressed the faith that God *is* with His people; just as, on another occasion, a Jewish mother gave expression to the national despair when she called her child Ichabod, meaning "the glory has departed"; and that the faith expressed in the name should be abundantly vindicated by the deliverance that should so speedily come. I am not giving you a piece of "modern criticism." I am simply pointing out what the Bible itself says. The facts are obvious and indisputable. Any

Messianic reference must be read into the story, for it certainly is not found there. What then are we to say of Matthew's quotation? Surely this, that he recognised the profounder significance of the name that was given to that child. The Word had become Flesh, and the wonder and glory of the Incarnation, that was the basic truth of the Christian Faith, were summarised in that name. The child of Isaiah's sign was *called* Immanuel; Jesus, as far as we have any record, was never so called, but He *was* Immanuel: "God was in Christ." Hence Matthew, who, far more than any other of the Evangelists, searched the Old Testament Scriptures for parallels and predictions, appropriates this prophecy of Isaiah, or rather a part of it, and gives it a new setting and fills it with a larger meaning. It is an adaptation of a prophetic word, not a literal fulfilment. If we insist on the rigid and literal method of prophetical interpretation, that passage in Matthew presents us with almost insuperable difficulties. If, however, we are willing to recognise the fact that the method of the Scripture writers themselves was not the rigid and literal method, the difficulty disappears.

The other instance to which I would refer you is the "Voice crying in the wilderness" prophecy. That, again, is an obvious *adaptation.* If we refer to the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, we find its original setting. It is part of the great word of encouragement to the exiles. Their tribulation is almost at an end. They are to return to their own land, God Himself being their Leader as surely as He

led their fathers in the Exodus from Egypt. The message was proclaimed by the Voice :

> "In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord,
> Make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

It is an instance of the "parallelism" of Hebrew poetry. The same thought is repeated in different words. There is no doubt whatever that this rendering is required both by the sense of the passage and by its poetic metre. The prophet was not a "voice crying in the wilderness." He was in Babylon with those to whom his message was addressed. The wilderness was the vast region stretching away between Babylon and the homeland of the exiles, through which he pictures their joyous and triumphant progress. But certain versions of Scripture, including our own Authorised Version, give a different turn to the passage—in the latter case by the alteration of a comma—and render it : "The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord." The Revised Version fortunately restores the true reading. The familiar Authorised Version rendering gives sense, but it is not the sense of the original. Of course the aptness of the words as a description of John the Baptist is obvious. He *was* a "voice crying in the wilderness," and his task was to "prepare the way of the Lord." Hence the passage is very aptly and appropriately applied to him. But it is only by a misuse of words, and by twisting their meaning, that we can speak of John *fulfilling* the prophecy. He *filled it full* with a deeper meaning, but the actual prophecy itself had no reference to him, either directly or indirectly. Again, there is

no difficulty in the matter, if we are content to take the Bible's own testimony, and recognise the freedom with which it uses its own material. A difficulty only arises when we insist on rigid and literal exactness of interpretation. By so doing we stress the letter : the Bible writers are always far more concerned about the spirit.

XXIII

A CHRISTOPHER WREN STORY

You ask me a very pertinent question: If what I have been saying is true, how can the Bible stand? If it is not perfect and infallible, how can we any longer appeal to it with confidence? How can we hope that it will continue to exercise its old influence on human life and thought? The doctrine of verbal inspiration gave us a sense of confident assurance. It was a strong pillar upon which the Bible stood firm and secure. If we take that pillar away, what assurance have we that the security and stability will remain?

Let me reply by another little story. In the town in which I live we have a Town Hall of which we are justly proud. It was built by Sir Christopher Wren. In the lower hall—the old Corn Market—are four large stone pillars. The story goes that when the hall was built the city fathers of the time were very dubious when they saw the expanse of ceiling over the lower hall without any support other than the surrounding walls. Therefore, to allay their fears, the architect supplemented his original plans, and erected the stone pillars; whereat everyone was satisfied, and had confidence that the building could be used with perfect safety. From that day to this it has been in constant use, and it is as secure to-day as it was two hundred

years ago. But careful examination reveals an interesting fact that is not obvious to the casual glance. The pillars stop short about half an inch from the ceiling! Whether the architect was actuated by pique or by a subtle sense of humour I do not know. Probably the latter. In any case the fact remains that the pillars have nothing whatever to do with the stability of the building, although they appear to be, and generations of townspeople have thought that they were, its main support.

Which things are an allegory. The support that has been given to the Bible by the verbal inspiration pillar has been of exactly the same nature as that given to the Town Hall ceiling by the stone pillars. It is an *apparent* support only. If those pillars were taken away it would not affect the stability of the building in the least. It would simply result in giving more freedom to move about on the floor space, which the pillars at present encumber. How will the Bible stand if we take away the doctrine of verbal inspiration? *Exactly as it always has stood.* The stability of the building is in itself; it does not depend on any later additions to it. Such later additions may have *appeared* to be very useful, but in reality they have only cumbered the ground, restricted the area of usefulness, and led folk to hold quite a wrong idea of the true state of affairs. That the verbal inspiration theory is a later addition to the structure not even its most zealous supporters can deny. The Bible itself came first, and the theory of verbal inspiration, like all other theories on the same subject, was the result of later devout meditation and speculation on the Bible. The theory

was developed with a twofold purpose, though the purpose may not have been expressly stated. It was, first, to explain the Bible, and, second, to support and defend it. And the theory has been used for those two purposes through all the centuries during which it has been in vogue. The Bible's uniqueness and power have been *explained* as due to its verbal inspiration and inerrancy. And the Bible has been *defended* against its foes, and *supported* in its claims by the same theory. The pillar has stood for a very long time, and it has been so intimately connected with the building that the great majority of beholders have never doubted that it was an integral part of the building, and that to interfere with it would be to endanger the whole structure. But that idea is a mistaken one, all the same. The building stood quite securely before that pillar was erected, and it will stand just as securely if the pillar be taken away. As a matter of fact, the pillar *does not reach the ceiling*, and it is not the support that it *appears* to be.

Again, it is worth reminding ourselves that a theory is not true simply because it is venerable. It may have a claim on our affection and respect for that reason, and we may therefore regret its passing. But when we find that, even though it may have stood unchallenged for centuries, it is not true, we have no right to hold on to it. Nor need our regrets be very profound, for the unsatisfactoriness of an old theory or explanation of anything only becomes apparent through the emergence of a more satisfactory and truer explanation. Hence we are more than compensated for a sentimental loss by a practical gain. If the newer is truer it must be

better. In every other sphere of life and thought we rejoice in that fact. Why then should we be afraid of it in the sphere of our religion? Professor Whitehead has very aptly commented on that attitude of fear that so many religious people take. He says, "While a new discovery in science, however revolutionary a change it necessitates in accepted systems of thought, is regarded as an advance and a triumph, in religion the abandonment of a traditional outlook is almost always looked on as a defeat—a battle lost." And he goes on to trace the weakness of organised religion to-day to this strange unwillingness to abandon untenable traditions.

The verbal inspiration theory of the Bible is not true. In spite of its venerable history, and the fact that it has been held with intensity of conviction by vast numbers of devout souls, and that they have thought it to be an essential pillar of the Faith, it does not accord with the facts. It is a devout speculation about the Bible: it is not a true explanation of the Bible. The Bible has won its triumphs in the past not because of that theory, but in spite of it. The theory has been given the credit for many of the victories, but they have been won by the Book itself, and by the intrinsic worth of its own message and appeal. And, although theoretically you may dispute that statement, practically you acknowledge it as fully as I do. Think of your own practical Christian work. You have for years been active in evangelistic and mission work, and you have been much blessed in it. Have you ever dealt with inquirers by first instructing them about the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, and after securing their

acceptance of that doctrine, *then* going on to proclaim the Bible message, and point them to Jesus Christ as Saviour? Of course not. You would shrink with horror from the very suggestion. You may teach your converts the verbal inspiration doctrine, but you do not expect to make converts by the doctrine. In practical Christian work you put first things first. And you recognise that the Bible's great message of God's love in Jesus Christ is the first thing, and that explanations and theories about the Bible are quite secondary. In a word, your own practice provides a quite conclusive argument against your precept.

Think again how all this is illustrated in the wonderful records of the mission field. The Bible has been well described as the Silent Missionary. Through the ministry of the great Bible societies, working both through their own agents and in co-operation with the ordinary missionary societies, the Scriptures are being distributed by tens of millions every year. The books penetrate to many places where the missionary has never been, and where the voice of the Christian teacher has never been heard. Hence, if any good is to result, it must be through the Bible's own ministry and its own appeal. The results that have followed that silent ministry constitute one of the most thrilling and inspiring romances of Christian history. They abundantly prove that the Bible needs no support from any inspiration theory. The power is in the Book itself, not in any pillars that Christian devotion has built to support it. Theories of inspiration may be useful to us for our intellectual satisfaction and interest, but we are no more bound

to accept a particular theory, or indeed any theory, before we can know the power of the Book and its message, than we are bound to accept any particular theory of heat and light before we can enjoy and rejoice in the beauty and warmth of the sunshine. Therefore, although modern research may compel us to alter our view-point and to abandon some of the ideas that our forbears have cherished for generations past, there is certainly no occasion for us to " tremble for the ark of the Lord."

XXIV

THE CHARGE AGAINST MODERNISM

I LIKE the concise terseness of your letters. Brevity may be the soul of other things besides wit. Wisdom for example. But your habit of avoiding details, and firing at me a definite challenge in the form of a question or statement makes it easier for me to reply to you, though it is not easy to reply with a similar brevity. However, you are very patient with me, and it is good of you to let me expound my case at such length. Your last letter certainly presents me with a very definite challenge. You ask me if I can deny the fact that whatever may be said in the way of theoretical arguments for the position I advocate, it cannot stand the test of " by their fruits ye shall know them." Apart even from the disturbing effects of such views in the Christian ranks, which is in itself a sufficiently serious matter, what about those who have been driven from the ranks ? Can I deny that the new views have undermined the faith of thousands of our young people, and led them into hopeless perplexity, if not complete infidelity ?

Well, I will meet your challenge with an equally definite reply. Yes, I do deny it, absolutely and unequivocally. I know that it is a stock argument with your friends, but the point that always strikes

me as significant is that, although the assertion is so often made, no proof of it is ever offered. At least I have never come across any, and I have studied the literature of the subject for a good many years. Where are these thousands of young people whose faith has been shattered in this way? To bring it to a concrete test, could you yourself give me the names of, say, five known to you? I am pretty certain that you could not. And if you reply, as you may quite justly do, that you are only an ordinary member of the rank and file, and that you do not pretend to have the wide experience of your leaders, I would suggest, both for your own satisfaction and for mine, that you pass on my challenge to some of them. Ask any one of them if he can honestly substantiate the charge from the records of his own personal experience. I shall be very greatly surprised if any very positive evidence is offered to you. Believe me that I am not suggesting this test in any flippancy. I am only anxious to get at the truth. I am a Christian minister, working among young people, with a serious sense of my responsibility towards them. If I am living in a fool's paradise, and quite misinterpreting the state of affairs as far as the religious thinking of young people is concerned, I shall be profoundly grateful to anyone, friend or foe, who will bring me face to face with the real facts of the situation.

Let me, however, tell you the grounds on which I base the somewhat dogmatic and categorical denial with which I meet your challenge. I am, in my own sphere, as you are in yours, a very ordinary member of the rank and file, and I cannot lay claim to the wide and varied experience that falls to the

lot of some men. And yet, in an undistinguished way, my experience has been fairly wide and varied. As you know, before going to College I spent some years in a large city office. I studied at two universities, in the second of which I came into somewhat closer contact with the generality of my fellow-students than does the average "theologue," owing to my occupying various positions of leadership in the students' unions and other organisations. Again, I have as a minister laboured in middle-class and working-class communities, while for some time I was engaged in deputation work that brought me into touch with many churches of different denominations, both in town and country. Finally, during the war I saw service with the Y.M.C.A., both at home and abroad. Forgive my cataloguing my own quite modest record in this way: I only want to point out that my experience has been sufficiently wide and varied to bring me into touch with a great many young people, both inside the churches and outside. I do not think it unreasonable to suggest that, in the course of such an experience, I ought surely to have come across at least a few of these thousands of young people whose faith has been shattered by modern teaching. So far, I have not met a single one.

I have met many who were brought up under religious influences, but who have since drifted into the ranks of the religiously indifferent or sceptical. And among them there are many, especially of the more thoughtful and intelligent, whose drifting has been greatly influenced, or even directly brought about, by the controversy with which we are dealing. Their early religious upbringing was of the

traditional orthodox kind, but when their own intellectual life began to develop they found themselves up against the difficulty of reconciling the traditional religious teaching with the knowledge they were acquiring through their ordinary education and their general reading. The indisputable facts of history and science seemed to them irreconcilable with the belief in an infallible and inerrant Bible, and they found themselves faced with apparent alternatives—the claims of Faith on the one hand, and the claims of Truth on the other. And, as they could not doubt that the latter were imperative, they—in some cases gladly, in many cases sadly—renounced the former. Or, to speak more correctly, they did not renounce them: they declined to respond to them. For, if faith be, as it surely is, a matter of free intelligent personal acceptance, the position was not that they surrendered a previously held personal faith, but that when they reached the age when the intelligent acceptance of such a personal faith became possible, they could not see their way to make the venture.

Hence it is not true to say that in these instances —alas, all too numerous!—the newer teaching destroyed faith; rather was it that the older teaching prevented faith. The traditional teaching had led them to believe that the doctrine of an infallible and inerrant Bible was vital to Christian truth, and it was that belief that made faith impossible for them. Nor are they, I think, in the least to be blamed. Their decision was based on a complete misapprehension, but they were following a true instinct when they felt that to profess a faith against which their intellect revolted was unworthy

and immoral. I am not suggesting that the Christian should believe only what his intellect can fully comprehend. To do so would be to exclude faith altogether. The Christian "sends his heart a little farther than his eyes," as A. C. Benson puts it. In Christian truth there is much that transcends our intelligence, but that is not a difficulty of faith: it is its glory. But a faith that transcends reason is very different from a faith that violates and contradicts reason. After all, our intelligence is a very important part of our God-given endowment, and we best honour the Giver by making full use of the gift. We must not forget that we are bidden to love the Lord our God with all our *mind*, as well as with all our heart and soul and strength.

And the pathetic—even tragic—thing about the situation we are considering is that these intelligent young people are kept from faith, not through surrender to a vice, but through loyalty to a virtue. And the irony of the situation is, that it is the very virtue that should have led them into faith—the virtue of loyalty to truth.

Now, to approach the matter from another angle, I make bold to say that it is not simply that the newer teaching about the Bible does not destroy faith, but that it cannot. You will, of course, agree with me that Christian faith is more, far more, than the intellectual acceptance of a creed. It is personal trust in Jesus Christ. A Christian in the true sense of that word, as distinct from the nominal sense in which we so often use it, is one who, by such personal trust in Jesus Christ, has entered into a

personal experience of pardon, peace and power. That experience may manifest itself in a multitude of different ways, for there are many "Types of Christian Piety" and "Varieties of Religious Experience"—to quote the titles of two well-known books that deal with that theme. But the all-important point is that it is a matter of experience. The Christian may be but a babe in understanding. There may be much, even in the domain of Christian teaching, that he does not comprehend. But he can say, "Once I was blind, but now I see." He has the witness in himself. Through faith he has entered into experience, and the experience remains as the surety of his faith. If, then, this experience be real at all, and not simply a matter of imagination, or the product of a passing emotional ecstasy, how *can* it be destroyed as you suggest?

Consider a simple analogy. On a rocky and dangerous coast there is a lighthouse. It is known, valued, and trusted by the sailors. In a very real sense they are saved by their faith in it. Few of them will know much about the actual structure of the lighthouse; for them it is the light that is all-important. There may, however, be certain traditional ideas about the structure that are in circulation among the sea-going fraternity; while if the lighthouse be an old one that has been associated with some of the old-time romances and tragedies of the sea, it will probably be the subject of many a sailor's yarn that is passed on from generation to generation. To the sailors it will be an object of affection, a trusted and well-tried friend. Suppose, then, a party of architectural and building experts visit the lighthouse, make a careful examination and

survey of it, and afterwards publish a descriptive account of the whole structure, the materials of which it is composed, and the architectural principles that were followed by the old-time builders. Such a publication might very possibly demonstrate that many of the traditional ideas on the subject were not altogether accurate. But would any sea-captain allow any such demonstration to destroy his faith? Would he, when next passing that dangerous coast, refuse to trust the light, or to direct his course by it as heretofore? Of course not. His trust is in the efficacy of the light, not in any traditional ideas about the structure of the lighthouse, and his faith would remain unshaken because it had stood the stern test of experience. He might be compelled to change some of his opinions, but the reality and reliability of his experience would be unaffected.

The analogy is not a perfect one, but it is sufficiently apt to illustrate my point. Modern critical scholarship is concerned with surveying and describing the structure of the lighthouse; it does not deal with the efficacy of the light. Or, to continue the figure, if it does enter the light chamber, its only task is to clean the windows, and polish the lenses, that the light may shine forth even more brightly.

I can assure you that I am not trying to build up a merely theoretical argument. "I speak that I do know, and testify that I have seen." Let me tell you of my own experience. I was brought up, with you, on the old lines, under the ministry of a stalwart of Evangelical truth. I do not forget, or fail to record with gratitude, that it was under that

ministry that " the great transaction was done " for my own soul. So far, my experience ran exactly parallel with yours. In those days it never occurred to me to doubt that the teaching we received was complete and all-satisfying, and that Christian discipleship involved its unquestioning acceptance. Religious perplexities did not exist for me. If I heard of other people having them I was quite confident, with that dogmatic self-assurance that so many of us have in the days of our youthful ardour, that it must be a matter of either mental or moral perversity. But I did not long remain in that state. My increasing contact with those who made no profession of religion, and with those who were definitely hostile—it was the time when Robert Blatchford was on the warpath—and also my own reading and thinking, all led me to see very clearly that there were many religious problems that I could not ignore if I wished to retain my intellectual honesty and integrity. Robert Blatchford was making much of the discrepancies and inaccuracies and inconsistencies that he found in the Bible, and I, for one, could not feel that it was a sufficient answer to call him opprobrious names, though that was the method that satisfied many. For a long time I was in a state of acute mental perplexity. On the one hand was my belief that the Bible was God's Word, inerrant and infallible. On the other hand was evidence, that I could not gainsay, that the Bible was *not* inerrant and infallible. I had been given to understand that the unquestioning acceptance of that belief was an integral part of my Christian loyalty, while on the other hand I could not escape the conviction that honesty compelled

me to acknowledge the existence of many facts that could not be reconciled with that belief. Looking back now I can see that there was a great deal of crudity in my thinking, and that I made mountains out of some quite insignificant molehills, but, after all, I was only a lad in my teens, with few educational advantages and no wise friend to guide me. But I can also see that I have reason to be most profoundly thankful that I was kept from making the tragic blunder of shutting my eyes to the light of facts through a mistaken sense of what loyalty to faith involved. But the point I want to stress is, that even in my most perplexed moods, when I did not know what to think, or believe, it never occurred to me to doubt the reality of my own spiritual experience. I *knew* that I was a Christian, through my personal faith in Jesus Christ.

I came through my mental perplexities when I was privileged to be brought into contact with wise teachers, who introduced me to an entirely new view-point. They did not proclaim it as such, nor did I ever hear from them a single word of attack upon the older views. They simply dealt with the facts. They did not come to the Bible with a particular theory regarding its inspiration, and then interpret it in the light of that theory. They expounded the Bible as it is, in its own light, and left us students to form our own unfettered judgment on the facts concerned. Through this wise method of instruction I made an illuminating discovery, though it was really only the discovery of an obvious truism. I realised for the first time the essential difference between a fact and a theory about a fact. I saw that I had been confusing the fact of the

inspiration of the Bible with a particular theory about that inspiration. And I saw, too, that the particular theory was an untenable one. I saw that to surrender a particular view about the Bible was in no sense an act of disloyalty to the Bible; rather did it open the way to a truer and deeper loyalty. I saw that all my perplexities about the Bible were due to a misapprehension as to the true nature and purpose of the Bible, and from that time onwards I have been able to say, adapting the words of *In Memoriam*:

> That mind and soul according well,
> Now make one music as before,
> But vaster.

I do not mean that I am now free from all religious problems and perplexities. A widening and deepening experience of life brings a Christian minister up against many problems that are far more perplexing than any concerning the text of Scripture, and the right method of its interpretation. But it is a great gain when facing up to those deeper moral and spiritual problems if one is free from the distraction of the conflict between heart and mind with which I have been dealing.

So much for my own personal experience. I do not record it as having any special significance in itself, but because I know it is just the kind of experience through which many others have passed as well. Let me supplement it with a testimony of a different kind. Dr. Horton, who for half a century has been engaged in a noble "mediating" ministry, combining the full flower of modern culture with an unswerving fidelity to evangelical

truth, wrote many years ago a book called *Revelation and the Bible*, in which, as in a previous book, *Inspiration and the Bible*, he expounded those views of Scripture that I have tried to pass on to you. His books were greeted in many quarters with suspicion, and often abuse, and he was made the victim of some very uncharitable and unchristian attacks. But among the many letters that reached him from readers of his books was one from a man who had been contemporary with him at Oxford. He was an agnostic, and his unbelief turned to cynicism. At the close of his life he wrote to tell Dr. Horton how he had read his books, and how the light had dawned upon him. "If," he said, "I could have read your book in my boyhood, I might have been spared all these years of darkness." That experience, too, is a typical one.

XXV

THE BEREANS

In looking back over our correspondence I am conscious of many omissions in my statement of the case. The subject that we have been discussing is, of course, a very large one, and we have dealt with only a few of its many aspects. On my part I have not attempted to be exhaustive, and I cannot hope to have met all your difficulties. I have, however, tried to present a certain point of view, and if what I have written leads you to follow up the subject, and to make careful study of certain aspects of it which have not hitherto come within your purview, I shall feel amply repaid.

In writing as I have done I have had two main purposes in mind. The first has been to commend to you a virtue to which you already lay claim, and which you think I and my friends lack! In one of your letters you said that, in contrast to the modernists, you and your friends preferred to be like the Bereans. It is the very thing that I have been begging you to be, for that is precisely the modernist attitude! My chief complaint against you is that you persist in being so un-Bereanlike. Read again the passage in Acts concerning them. Wherein did their "nobility" consist? Not simply in that they "searched the Scriptures," for many of the Apostles' most bitter antagonists were zealous

in doing that. Nor even that they searched them "daily," though that is the point stressed by the organisation called "The Berean Band," with its admirable scheme of daily Bible study. No, it was that they searched the Scriptures daily *whether those things were so.* Paul had come to them with startlingly new and "modernistic" teaching. They did not eagerly accept it simply because of its novelty, nor did they contemptuously reject it because it was something different from what they had hitherto believed. They gave Paul a fair hearing, and then set themselves to examine the arguments he had set before them. "Therefore many of them believed." Evidently they were not all convinced, but the Biblical historian does not differentiate between them on that account. He does not say that those who believed were the "more noble" ones. The nobility was shown in the fair-mindedness of their investigation of the facts, not in the verdict that some of them gave as a result of the investigation. Hence I say, "Go thou and do likewise." I can sum up all the pleas and arguments I have put before you in one sentence: Search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. If anything I have said is not in accord with the Bible facts, reject it, but do let the facts decide the issue. You have been vigorously accusing me and my friends of being disloyal to the Bible, but the somewhat ironical situation is that it is I, and not you, who have been appealing to the Bible's own testimony, and offering to submit every disputed point to its authority. You have made very definite assertions *about* the Bible, and you have strenuously defended certain ideas and

theories and methods of interpretation that have developed and become established in the course of the Christian centuries, but you have been strangely reluctant to test those ideas and theories by reference to the facts of the Bible itself. Surely what the Bible itself says, and the patent facts of its own structure and history, have a far greater claim to our attention than anything has that later Christian speculation has said about the Bible, however sincere and devout the latter may have been. In a word, the Berean attitude is the only one that is worthy.

In the second place, I have been earnestly desirous of stressing the great fact of the Christian fellowship which goes so far deeper than our intellectual differences. I emphasised at the beginning that the glorious all-inclusive name of Christian is so much more important than any of our party labels, and I want to end on that note. Difference of opinion has always been prominent in the Christian Church, and probably always will be. And often such differences have led to bitter controversy and dissension. But a family does not cease to be a family because its members may not always see eye to eye. And cannot we, in spite of our differences of opinion, rejoice to stress the fact that we all belong to the great family of God? In one of the periodicals you sent me some time ago there was an article entitled "Can a Modernist be a Christian?" The writer answered his question very definitely in the negative. I will not quote his arguments, although it would be easy to show that they completely misunderstand and misrepresent the modernist position. I will deal briefly

with just one point. He named as typical representatives of "unchristian" modernists, Fosdick, Shailer Matthews, Ballard, Glover, R. J. Campbell and others. It made me wish that I could try a little experiment. I have three books on my shelves that I should like to send you, having first blotted out their titles and the names of their authors. If I could get you to read them, and to judge them on their merits without any reference to the names of the authors, I am perfectly sure that your honest verdict would be the same as that of tens of thousands of other readers of the books, viz., that they had given you a wonderful mental and spiritual tonic, and made Jesus Christ intensely more real and precious to you than ever He had been before. The books are *The Jesus of History*, by Dr. Glover, and *The Manhood of the Master* and *The Meaning of Prayer*, by Dr. Fosdick. Yet these are men who, according to the writer of the article, cannot be Christians because they interpret the Bible from the modern view-point!

The pity of it! Why cannot we learn from the very Book we profess to take as our guide, and from the Master whom we profess to serve? It is so easy to make the mistake of the disciples who came to Jesus with their complacent report, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbad him, because he followed not with us." That's it—he followed not *with us*! And Jesus rebuked their uncharitable zeal, and said, in effect, "Because he does not follow you, it does not necessarily mean that he is not following Me." If the "devils are being cast out" in Christ's name, if souls are being won for the Kingdom, if men and

women are being led to give their lives in Christ-like service, cannot we be big-hearted and large-minded enough—cannot we be Christian enough—to rejoice?

Think of the mission field. Are missionary zeal and devotion an exclusively fundamentalist prerogative? Of course they are not. There are vast areas of the field where noble work has been, and is being done by those with whose theological and ecclesiastical views you have little sympathy, but whose Christlike labours have been blessed by the Master to the salvation of multitudes. You cannot deny that it is so: why not follow the dictates of your heart rather than those of your head, and rejoice that it is so? Think of Dan Crawford and Albert Schweitzer in the heart of Africa. The one a rigid fundamentalist, the other an out-and-out modernist, but each laying everything on the altar of service because "the love of Christ constrained" him.

Think of the silent but eloquent witness of your hymn-book. By using their hymns as you do you have fellowship of devotion with fellow-Christians of all schools of thought. You might place your ban on the late Dr. Washington Gladden, for example, because of his "modernist" book, *Who Wrote the Bible?* but you would have no qualms about singing his hymn:

> O Master, let me walk with Thee
> In lowly paths of service free.

I am not pleading that you should surrender your convictions and accept the shallow judgment that it does not matter what we believe, because in the

long run one belief is just as good as another. On the contrary, I would say: Hold fast your convictions. Do not surrender a single one of them until you have a better to put in its place. But don't be afraid to put them under examination sometimes. It may appear, under such examination, that some of what we call convictions are only deeply-rooted prejudices. And even with our genuine and well-grounded convictions it is well to remember that it is often possible to improve on them. None of us sets out in life with the maximum of wisdom and understanding, nor do we quickly attain to the maximum. We should, therefore, cultivate the teachable spirit, the receptive mind, the willingness to learn. It is a profound pity when we use our convictions as chains and padlocks to fasten the doors of our mind against the entry of any new idea. The Apostle tells us to "hold fast that which is good," but don't forget that he also says, "Prove all things." Such proving may demonstrate that some things that we have long held are really not good enough to justify our holding fast to them. Again, another Apostle tells us that we should always "be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in us," but he adds, "with meekness and fear." And yet again, let us always remember that our Bibles contain the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians.

The Bible is the world's wonder Book. As a literary treasure it is unique, while its moral and spiritual power are immeasurable. However we approach it we cannot possibly pay too high a tribute to its excellency and worth. It is, and it ever will be, an unfailing source of inspiration for

both thought and life. But the supreme value of the Bible is that it is the Book of Christ. And the best tribute we can pay to the Bible is to respond to the lordship of the Christ of the Bible, and to seek to live in His Spirit. In the last analysis the only test of our loyalty to the Bible is our loyalty to Jesus Christ.

INDEX

A

Alexandrinus, Codex, 91
Amalekites, slaughter of, 160
Anselm, 20, 65
Apocalyptic books, 134, 199 ff., 200, 202 ff.
Apocryphal gospels, 73
Armageddon, battle of, 197
Astruc, 133 f.
Atonement, the, 20, 69 f.
Authorised Version, 47, 90, 214, 216
Authority of Bible, 99, 236 f.; Calvin on, 76; Catholics on, 76 ff.; Luther on, 76 f.
Authorship of Biblical books, 49, 131 ff., 133, 135, 201 f.

B

Barnabas, epistle of, 73
Bereans, the, 235 f.
Bible, the, 66 ff., 90, 157; authority of, 76 ff., 236 f.; discrepancies in, 231; interpreting itself, 212, 214, 216 f., 222, 232, 236 f.; Luther on authority of, 76 f.; message of, 163, 222; modern translations of, 90; poetry in (*see* Poetry); progressive revelation in, 98; in Protestant thought, 77 f.; and the Reformers, 76 ff.; and science, 165 f., 171 ff., 174, 192; Societies, 91, 222
Blatchford, 97, 113, 231
Burgon, Dr, 80 f., 84, 154
Butler's "Analogy," 99 f., 111

C

Calvin, 65, 76, 79
Canon of New Testament, 72, 73 f.
Carey, William, 20
Census of David, 108 ff.
Chapter-headings, 214
Chillingworth, 76

Clement of Rome, epistle of, 73
Collett, Sidney, 104 ff., 125, 173 f., 200
Cooper, Thomas, 113
Copernicus, 61, 171
Copies of Biblical MSS., 46, 111
Copyists, errors of, 107
Crawford, Dan, 239
Creation, stories of, 9, 48, 129, 172, 182, 185 ff., 188 f.
Creeds, the, 70 f., 146
Criticism, 29 f., 37, 38, 41 ff., 44, 48 f., 52, 59, 133, 137; Higher, 44 ff., 52, 58 f., 60, 126, 137; history of, 114; Jesus on, 138; Lower, 45 ff.; meaning of, 40 ff., 47; methods of, 41 f., 45; modern, 69, 114, 120; object of, 41 f.; problems of, 46; results of, 42, 56; textual, 46 f.
Cuneiform tablets, 188

D

Damascus, John of, 82, 83
Daniel, book of, 199 f., 202 f., 204 f.
David, census of, 108 ff.; psalms of, 202
Davidson, Dr A. B., 59, 61 f.
Deutero-canonical books, 83
Discrepancies, in Bible, 97 f., 104 ff., 130 f., 231
Dods, Dr Marcus, 83
Driver, Dr, 59, 185
Drummond, Henry, 62, 94
Duff, Dr A., 132 f.

E

Ellicott, Bishop, 80
Emmanuel, prophecy, the, 213 f.
Enoch, book of, 200 ff.
Eusebius, 73
Evolution, 166, 172 f.

F

Farrar, Dean, 82 f., 86 ff.
Fathers, writings of the, 46
Folklore, 152, 188
Forsyth, Dr, 31, 54
Fosdick, Dr, 238
Fourth Gospel, 87, 142
Fundamentalists, 24, 37, 38 ff., 115, 172

G

Galatians, Epistle to, 20
Genesis, 48; a compilation, 133 f.; creation story in, 182; Driver's Commentary on, 185; and geology, 172 ff.; names of God in, 48, 60; sources of, 133 f.
Glover, Dr T. R., 238
God, names of, in Genesis, 48, 60; Old Testament ideas of, 159
Gore, Dr, 9, 143
Gospels, the, 73; discrepancies in, 107; integrity of, 140; portrait of Jesus in, 149 f.; pseudo, 73; as records, 146 f.
Gosse, Dr Philip, 173
Gregory the Great, quoted, 85

H

Hammurabi, Code of, 48
Hebrews, epistle to, 73
Helvetic Confession, the, 79
Higher criticism, 44 ff., 52, 58 f., 126, 137
Hilary of Tours, 175
Historians, Biblical, 100 f.
Hobbes, 133
Hort, Dr, 47
Horton, Dr, 233 f.

I

Incarnation, the, 146, 215
Infallibility, papal, 77; verbal, 80
Inquisition, the, 171, 173
Inspiration, 81 f., 100, 181, 189 f., 232 f.; the Church and, 69 f., 71, 74; doctrine of, 76; meaning of, 93 f., 102 f.; mechanical theories of, 103, 181; Moslem doctrine of, 84; of poetry, 95; post-Reformation ideas of, 71; pre-Reformation ideas of, 70; rabbis on, 72; theories of, 69 ff., 72, 84, 103; verbal, 61 f., 67 f., 81 f., 110, 154, 218 f., 221 f.
Isaiah, 208 f.; authorship of book of, 115 f., 122; message of, 118

J

James, epistle of, 73
Jeremiah, 95 f., 209
Jerome, 65

Jesus, authority of, 138; baptism of, 148; the Boy, 145; Divinity of, 139, 144; His use of fiction, 151; portrait of, in Gospels, 149 f.; the, of History, 35; reference of, to Jonah, 150 f.; limitations of, 147 f.; manhood of, 146 f.; and the Mosaic tradition, 132, 143, 149; and Old Testament, 139, 143 f., 150, 152; omniscience of, 144; protest of, against the letter, 72; reporters of, 139 f., 149; our standard in Biblical interpretation, 160
Job, book of, 152
John, epistles of, 73
Jonah, 49, 150 f.
Joshua, book of, 125
Jowett, Dr Benj., 66

K

Kennedy, Studdert, quoted, 175
Keswick movement, 61 f.
Kingsley, Charles, quoted, 174
Knox, Father Ronald, 25
Koran, the, 84

L

Latin versions, 46
Law, the, 130 f.
Legends, 101
Lodge, Sir Oliver, 194
Logos, 87 f.
Loisy, Abbé, 29
Lower criticism, 45 ff.
Luke, 84 f., 140
Luther, 20, 65, 76 f., 83

M

Maccabean period, 200
Macdonald, Geo., 187
Macgregor, Rev. G. H. C., 61 f.
MSS., ancient, 79, 91; copies of Biblical, 46, 111; early, 47; Greek, 46; Hebrew, 46; New Testament, 46; original, 46, 111
M'Leod, Campbell, 20
Matthew, 213 ff.
Messianic hope, the, 213 ff.
Moabite stone, the, 48
Modernism, 15 f., 19, 26 f., 29 ff., 36 f., 224 ff., 235, 238
Moffatt, Dr, 84, 90 ff.

Moody, D. L., 62
Mosaic authorship, 9, 42, 124 ff., 129, 131
Moses, 42, 124 ff., 127, 175, 202
Mythology, non-Biblical, 188

N

Nativity story, the, 213 f.
Nixon, Dr A. J., 156

O

Origen, 200
Orr, Dr, 58 ff., 129, 130 f.

P

Papal authority, 77
Papyri, 48
Parables in Old Testament, 151 f.
Parallelism in Hebrew poetry, 216
Paterson Smyth, Dr, 63
Paul, 20, 35, 65; "The Acts of," 73
Peake, Dr A. S., 50, 54, 83, 128
Pember, G. H., 185
Pentateuch, the, 9, 118, 124, 127; authorship of, 42, 129 f., 131 ff., 135; documents in, 134; Jesus and, 149; Laws in, 130 f.; legal codes in, 134; Mosaic element in, 131; structure of, 42, 129, 134
Peter, "Gospel of," 73
Post-millenarianism, 196
Pre-millenarianism, 196, 198
Prodigal Son, parable of the, 151
Progressive revelation in the Bible, 98
Prophets, the, 95 f., 102; interpretation of, 190, 196 ff., 202 f.; message of, 207 f., 209 f., 211; modern light on, 195; of Old Testament, 207 ff., 211; poetry in, 187; schools of, 209; in war-time, 197 f., 205
Protestants and the Bible, 77 ff.
Psalms, the, 155, 202, 208
Pseudonymous writings, 201 f.

R

Ramsay, Sir W. M., 140 f.
Reformation, the, 20, 71, 76 ff.

Resurrection narratives, the, 107
Revelation, 33; and discovery, 33, 167; and science, 171 f.
Revelation, book of, 74, 181, 199 f., 202 f., 204 f.
Revised Version, the, 47, 91, 216
Robertson Smith, Dr, 1, 61
Ryle, 185

S

Samaritan, the good, parable of, 151
Samuel, 49, 202
Sayce, Prof., 188
Schreiner, Olive, 32 f., 162
Schweitzer, Dr Albert, 239
Science, 18, 30, 105, 192 f.; and the Bible, 166 f., 171 ff., 174, 192; the Church's attitude towards, 170 f.; evolutionary, 166; integrity of, 169 f.; limitations of, 193 f.; medical, 178; modern, 69, 164 f.; psychological, 178; and religion, 18, 168 f., 175, 193; and revelation, 171 f.; and theology, 193
Second Coming, the, 205
"Shorter Bible, The," 152, 163
Sinaiticus, Codex, 91
Slavery justified in Old Testament, 161
Smith, Dr Geo. Adam, 59, 115 f., 195
Souter, 73
Spinoza, quoted, 133; his Political Tract, 132
Supernatural and natural, 34

T

Talmud, the, 125
Taylor, Jeremy, 145
Tel el-Amarna tablets, the, 48
Ten Commandments, the, 156
Tennyson, quoted, 16, 188
Textual criticism, 46 f., 79
Thirty-nine Articles, the, 71
Translation work, 46 f.; modern, 90
Tyndale, 91
Tyrrell, 29

V

Vaticanus, Codex, 91
Verbal inspiration, 9, 61 f.,

67 ff., 72, 81 f., 84, 107 ff., 110, 154, 173, 218 ff., 221 f.
Version, Armenian, 46; Authorised, 47, 90 f., 216; Coptic, 46; English, 65, 210; Latin, 46; Moffatt's, 84, 90; Revised, 47, 91; Syriac, 46; Tyndale's, 91; Weymouth's, 91
Virgin Birth, the, 214

W

Washington Gladden, 239
Wesley, John, 96
Westcott, Bishop, 47
Westminster Confession, the, 71, 79
Weymouth's translation, 91
Whitehead, Prof., 221
Whittier, 28
Wilson, Prof. R. D., 52, 54, 57
Word of the Lord, the, 68
Word of God, the, 86 ff.
Wren, Sir Christopher, a story of, 218

Y

Young, Dr Dinsdale, 63

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